

365



**FROM**  
THE HIT HORROR  
SERIES RETURNS

**FEAR THE  
WALKING DEAD**  
UNLOCKING THE FINAL SEASON

**LOCKWOOD  
& CO**  
CAMERON CHAPMAN  
TALKS INSPIRATIONS

**STAR WARS:  
VISIONS**  
THE ANIME STRIKES BACK

**SIL0**  
HUMANITY  
DIGS DEEP

**DOCTOR  
WHO**  
KATY MANNING ON  
JO'S COMEBACK

**EXCLUSIVE!**  
**STAR TREK**  
**PICARD**

**SECRETS OF THE SCI-FI SMASH REVEALED**

**PLUS!** BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED | NICK FURY | THE LITTLE MERMAID | MIA GOTH | DEAD RINGERS  
BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER | SWEET TOOTH | DOOM PATROL | PETER PAN & WENDY | SHREK!



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# First Contact

## Hailing Frequencies Open!



Amanda Plummer could kick your arse as Vadik.



### PICARD 3: PICARDER

**Keith Tudor, email** I have really been enjoying the latest season of *Star Trek: Picard*. It's been a treat seeing the *Next Generation* crew reunited and it's been fun getting to know the Titan crew. The Shrike and her captain are a formidable force and I'm enjoying all the callbacks to the 36-year history of the *TNG* characters. Such a shame that, like *Star Trek: Discovery's* next season, these will be the last episodes. At least it looks like it will be going out on a high.

**SFX:** As Spock is fond of saying, there are always possibilities...

**Robert Graham, email** We are really spoilt for choice at the moment and I'm loving the fact that we've got *Star Trek: Picard* season three and *The Mandalorian* season three on at the same time and I'm loving both.

Great seeing Worf and Doctor Crusher in *Star Trek: Picard* along with Riker and an intriguing new ship that could be right for a new *Star Trek* spin-off series. Meanwhile Amanda Plummer is threatening to steal the series as Vadik.

### OH BABY

**Rob McRob, email** I'm sat watching *The Mandalorian* and Grogu is now speaking his first words – he'll be wanting a PlayStation next!

Everything was going smoothly when all of a sudden the Morlocks turned up and were super-hostile to Mando. For a minute or two I thought I'd selected the wrong programme when it dawned on me that I was still watching Mando and co! What's going on, *SFX*? Now Mando and the baby are tackling beasts from another universe – and no Rod Taylor/H George Wells to help!

**SFX:** Never mind the Morlocks... where do we get those glowing ice lollies from episode three?



On *The Last of Us* being renewed for season two: the first one doesn't need a follow up. Sometimes shows should just stop on a high note.

**Didier Télégone**



Loved the *Evil Dead* films but upping the gore just turns me off.

**@NamedMunn**

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"I don't mind being called a smeghead, though"



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## Rants & Raves

Inside the **SFX** hive mind

**DARREN SCOTT** EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Excited to have *From* back – I can tell you that the first few episodes of season two are fantastically creepy.

→ Loved *Evil Dead Rise* – brutal, bloody and brilliant.

→ Delighted that more *Star Trek* is coming with *Starfleet Academy*.

### RANTS

→ No idea what's really going on in *The Mandalorian*, but it looks fantastic.

**IAN BERRIMAN** DEPUTY EDITOR

### RAVES

→ I have my issues with Wes Anderson's oeuvre, but I'm excited that he's made a sci-fi movie. Fingers crossed *Asteroid City* will be as good as *Rushmore*.

→ It's pleasing that the BFI are honouring Dario Argento with a 17-film season throughout May ([bit.ly/bfidario](http://bit.ly/bfidario)). Wait, though, does this mean he's now *respectable*?

→ I'm learning Polish, and visualising sci-fi stuff helps remember some of the vocabulary. For example, *spoko* means cool (picture Leonard Nimoy in shades), and *daleko* is far (picture... well, you can guess).

**JONATHAN COATES** ART EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Delighted to see the cooker from Wallace and Gromit's *A Grand Day Out* making a cameo as a droid in *Star Wars: Visions* "I Am Your Mother". Perhaps we'll also discover the penguin from *The Wrong Trousers* lurking under one of those Mandalorian helmets.

→ Finally, Wes Anderson does sci-fi! I couldn't be more excited for *Asteroid City*. Surely an apt moment to watch this great Wes Anderson-style *X-Men* parody one more time: [bit.ly/wesxmen](http://bit.ly/wesxmen).

**ED RICKETTS** PRODUCTION EDITOR

### RAVES

→ I was happily surprised by the *Diablo IV* beta test (once I could actually log in, of course). It played smoothly, had loads going on, and compared to *III* it was noticeably more dark and gory. That scene with the priest? Yikes...

→ Also looking forward to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* game – I just hope they can capture the atmosphere of the original.

**NICK SETCHFIELD** EDITOR-AT-LARGE

### RAVES

→ Delighted to hear Amazon's picked up new animated series *Batman: Caped Crusader* for two seasons. Love the noirish vibe it's going for. Let's hope it captures some of that old TAS magic.

→ Podcast recommendation: *The 4:30 Movie* by the *Inglorious Trekspeers* team. Check it out for some engaging retro film chat.

**TARA BENNETT** US EDITOR

### RAVES

→ Hoping *Picard* season three is proof of concept for a *Legacy* spin-off. Watching these actors from various series come together has been too much fun.

### RANTS

→ Is there an actual story arc for *The Mandalorian*? Asking for a friend.

## Captain's Log



"Unless you actually seize me and fling me into a dungeon!"



Hey Mr DJ – wait, what do you mean we're not mixtape-ready after all? Apologies to *Guardians Of The Galaxy* fans who were, quite rightly, expecting to read about the new film in this issue. Unfortunately no-one involved in the movie was available to speak with us.

But, if you're looking for a sci-fi epic, the team from *Star Trek: Picard* has, also quite rightly, absolutely blown people away. Now *that* is how you do it. As the best sci-fi series in a very, very long time, I thought it would be fitting to let the cast of *The Next Generation* take one final cover bow. Hopefully it's not the last we see of them, but I can't wait to see what the future holds in the 25th century.

Another hard act to follow, the legendary Katy Manning – a dear friend of mine and godmother to my late pug Toby – pays *SFX* a visit this month to talk baby Sea Devils (no, not Toby) and the dreaded HD. Plus there's the return of *From*, which, if you enjoy horror, I implore you to watch. The second season really ramps things up. I also enjoyed a chat with the charming Cameron Chapman about everything from Lockwood to Warhol, plus there's not one but two animated *Star Wars* series headed our way. Talk about variety – you don't get that in any other magazine. On that note, we'd better get back to finishing the next one!

Darren X



ANJLI MOHINDRA · DANIEL ANTHONY · MINA ANWAR



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# *THE FUTURE FIRST!* **Red Alert**

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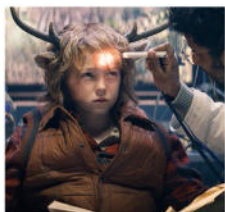
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## WITCH, PLEASE

Bringing Ursula to life in *The Little Mermaid*

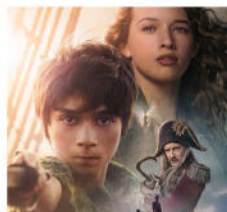
### Highlights



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#### SWEET TOOTH

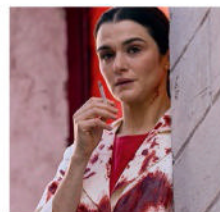
→ Oh deer! Gus is back for a second season based on the DC Comic book. Is this Gunn canon?



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#### PETER PAN

→ Another Disney live action remake, another fan outcry about a cartoon animal (possibly).



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#### DEAD RINGERS

→ David Cronenberg's classic movie is brought back to life as a new, gender-flipped television series.





Ursula (Melissa McCarthy): everybody shout “Boo!”



Halle Bailey as Ariel doesn’t know what’s coming for her.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

# Divine Inspiration

The director of **The Little Mermaid** explains how they brought Ursula to life

➔ HALF-WOMAN, HALF OCTOPUS, all chaos energy: Ursula is an icon. Despite having just 13 minutes of screen time in *The Little Mermaid*, the sea witch sauntered into our lives and never left, bewitching every child who watched Disney’s animated classic.

Originally voiced by Pat Carroll, Ursula casts a terrifying shadow over the forthcoming live-action remake – who could bring the beloved character to life and do the role justice? Director Rob Marshall (*Chicago*, *Into The Woods*) knew it would be tricky.

“It was really daunting to think about who was going to play this part,” Marshall tells Red Alert. “I love that she was originally inspired by Divine [Harris Glenn Milstead], the wonderful

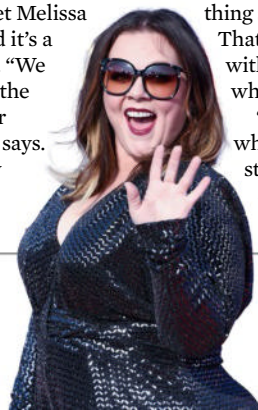
drag actor, who was so original and so funny. I thought, ‘Well, who’s going to be able to bring the humour and the depth?’ Because this is now a live-action piece, it can’t just be a funny character, it has to have a great deal of depth. Who can do that and sing – really sing – and bring originality? I wanted a woman of size, too, as I thought that was important.”

Then Marshall accidentally met Melissa McCarthy (*Bridesmaids*, *Spy*), and it’s a story as Hollywood as they come. “We were sitting at the same table for the Golden Globes, when I was up for *Mary Poppins Returns*,” Marshall says. “Emily Blunt, John Krasinski, my partner [and *Little Mermaid*’s co-producer] John DeLuca were

all at the table, and Melissa [nominated for her role in *Can You Ever Forgive Me?*] was there and she was just so wonderful and funny and great. And I thought, ‘Well, she’s fabulous.’”

Marshall instigated a proper meeting to discuss Ursula. “You could have knocked me over with a feather when she said to me: ‘I started as a drag performer.’ That was the first thing she said to me: ‘I was in drag shows. That’s how I started, I had this character with a big cape.’ She’s described the whole thing.

“And she goes, ‘So I understand where the beginnings of this character started.’ And then we just talked. She’s a wonderful actress, people forget that. They say, ‘Oh, she’s





## “Melissa had eight dancers around her playing her tentacles”

funny’ This character is an injured character, and she was able to find all that depth and emotion, in addition to all the colours.

“We really used Divine as our inspiration, because that’s where it started,” he adds. “But the thing about Divine is that she’s bigger than life, and this character is bigger than life, but at the same time, Melissa was able to bring humanity to it.

“When you’re doing a live-action piece, the most important thing is to find the humanity and the truth in these performances. I want to believe you, even if that’s a merperson, mermaid or merman. I want to believe these people so I’m invested in the story.”

Even after finding the perfect actress, making Ursula a reality was easier said than done. Everything had to be meticulously planned, with Marshall creating animatics of various sequences, choreographing the dances

and doing some previsualisation. Then they started rehearsals so that McCarthy could get a feel for the character, the space she would be moving in, and the multiple dancers acting as her tentacles.

“Melissa had eight dancers around her playing her tentacles as if we were doing something like *War Horse*,” Marshall says. “All these wonderful dancers were puppeteering as she moved. She had this incredible costume on where she had a harness, and from that came those tentacles.”

The bulk of the movement was planned with McCarthy and the dancers on the floor – then came the time for her to be put into a rig and lifted from the ground. That’s when a whole new set of equipment was introduced so that the team could achieve the underwater effect.



Divine in 1978: Ursula’s original inspiration.

“We used wires and a tuning fork [two prongs that lock either side of the body], where you go up and you can spin and dive and move,” Marshall says. “And then we also used a teeter-totter [see-saw], which can do a little tipping, but it’s not as flexible as a tuning fork. A lot of equipment was very cutting-edge and

new because we kept trying to find ways to make our characters work the way we wanted them to. So in addition to her tentacles, she also had a series of stunt people moving her on these rigs. It was like a ballet.”

A chance meeting at the Golden Globes, hours of rehearsal, eight dancers playing tentacles, a tuning fork and a see-saw – that’s a lot of work to bring an icon to life. **JS**

*The Little Mermaid is in cinemas from 26 May.*

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**► SCI-FACT!** Melissa McCarthy recently cameoed in *Thor: Love & Thunder*, playing an actor playing Cate Blanchett’s Hela from *Ragnarok*.





IT'S JUST SHY OF TWO years since Netflix's adaptation of Jeff

Lemire's Vertigo comic *Sweet Tooth* left us with the cliffhanger of hybrid deer-boy Gus (Christian Convery) being captured by General Abbot (Neil Sandilands) and his Last Man army. He was then thrown into a zoo pen with a pack of other hybrid children because Abbot wants Dr Aditya Singh (Adeel Akhtar) to use their stem cells to find a cure for the pandemic known as "The Sick".

With the series debuting against the backdrop of the real-life pandemic, showrunner Jim Mickle and his collaborators managed to turn the dark story into a primary-coloured fairy tale, expressing the show's world through the childlike eyes of Gus.

Taking big departures from the comic with expanded character arcs and back stories, that world is now firmly established, which Mickle tells *Red Alert* has freed them to get even more ambitious in season two. "Now we can take all these characters and really pit them against each other, but also start to dive into the mysteries too," he says.

## THE GOONIE SHOW

How the hybrids came to be, and how they are part of what wiped out humanity, will continue to be slowly revealed this season. But Mickle says the primary goal is to get Gus, pig-girl hybrid Wendy (Naledi Murray) and her adopted siblings out of Abbot's prison. The plucky menagerie, inspired by *The Goonies*, is represented through real kids wearing practical animal prosthetics – which Mickle says has been daunting.

"Before we went into this season, the thing on everyone's mind was, 'How the hell do we pull this off?' Doing Gus and Wendy practically, and [groundhog hybrid] Bobby as a full puppet almost crushed the season one production. Now we have 15!"

He credits the show's New Zealand crew, creature designer Jane O'Kane, on-set puppeteers and two "hybrid coaches" that tutored the child actors for making it all work. And he promises that scene-stealer Bobby will appear even more than last season.

Wendy, Earl Elephant, Gus and Maya Monkey.



SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

# Super Furry Animals

The chase for a cure is on as **Sweet Tooth** returns

"One of our cinematographers came into his first test and said, 'Oh, there's Bobby, the overtime machine,'" Mickle laughs. "That's pretty much what he is, but we learned a lot with him in season one. And Fractured FX, who built him, rebuilt him with even more capabilities."

With the stakes amped up, Mickle says a big theme for season two is that realisation that "you can't go home again", which was inspired by the discomfort of coming out of Covid. As Jepperd (Nonso Anozie) and Aimee (Dania Ramirez) team up to get the kids back, they'll pick at one another's

vulnerabilities. "With Aimee, the moment the world turned upside down, she locked herself away. And then she never really came out," Mickle says.

With Jep, the tragedy of his lost family and his work with the Last Man army will continue to haunt him. Mickle says creator Jeff

The kids are... sort of alright in their own way?







“Now we can take all these characters and really pit them against each other”



Lemire joined them in the writers' room and was adamant that the show shouldn't lose the darkness and edge established in the comic for Jep. "Nonso has this gentle giant thing to him that you don't want to take away. But I think we

found a really great balance of being able to bring that out in an unexpected way, but still letting that play against his relationship with Aimee."

Mickle also teases that the Singhs will continue to struggle with the moral dilemma of Rani's virus infection and the cost of killing hybrids to save human lives. "In season one, we were able to push them really far. Now we're turning the screws and spinning the dials to push them again. I love where they come out with all this."

As captives of Abbot, his motivations will be revealed. "When you look at authoritarian figures, they are trying to go back to an imaginary version of the way things were, which is the appeal to them," Mickle says. "Getting into that psyche allowed Neil to just dig right into that."

The mercurial leader will also be tested by his kind-hearted brother Johnny (Marlon Williams). "Marlon is just this sweet, awkward in the best way, gentle soul. Pitting him against



Neil Sandilands as General Abbot. He not nice.

crazy Neil was just like letting those fireworks go!"

Meanwhile, Becky/Bear (Stefania LaVie Owen) will find herself making a shocking choice to help Gus. "We're interested in Becky as that middle generation. In the comic book, Gus learns that the world isn't black and white, it's made of grey areas. We were able to turn that towards Becky this time, because it's as much her coming of adulthood as it is Gus's coming of age." **TB**

*Sweet Tooth* is on Netflix from 27 April.



## NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Great disturbances in the Force: Lucasfilm shelving Kevin Feige's *Star Wars* movie along with Patty Jenkins's **Rogue Squadron**. Steven Knight replaces Damon Lindelof as screenwriter of untitled *Star Wars* film.

→ Sequel to Sam Raimi's 2009 horror **Drag Me To Hell** currently in development.

→ James Gunn writing and directing **Superman: Legacy**.

→ Aaron Taylor-Johnson joining Robert Eggers's remake of **Nosferatu**.

→ *Wednesday*'s Jenna Ortega in the frame for Tim Burton's **Beetlejuice 2**.

→ Kumail Nanjiani and Patton Oswald signed for the **Ghostbusters: Afterlife** sequel.

→ Christophe Gans directing **Return To Silent Hill**, based on the storyline of the *Silent Hill 2* game.

→ Jordan Peele's next movie arriving 25 December 2024.

→ Dexter Fletcher directing **Fountain Of Youth** for Skydance Productions.

→ Barbie Ferreira and Dacre Montgomery starring in reimagining of infamous 1978 video nasty **Faces Of Death**.



GILBERT FLORES/VARIETY VIA GETTY

**SCI-FACT!** *Sweet Tooth* season one was watched by 60 million households in its first month of release on Netflix.





PORTRAIT BY STORM SANTOS



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

# Out For The Count

The *Boogeyman* star David Dastmalchian on his horror comic **Count Crowley**

YOU'LL DEFINITELY HAVE SEEN DAVID Dastmalchian on screen over the last few years. After a breakout role as one of the Joker's thugs in *The Dark Knight*, the actor has appeared in a string of high-profile projects. He played Polka Dot Man in *The Suicide Squad*, Piter de Vries in *Dune*, and is set to star in upcoming Stephen King adaptation *The Boogeyman*.

What you might not know is that he's also a comics author. He launched his first book *Count Crowley: Reluctant Monster Hunter* in 2019, with artist Lukas Ketner. A second run of the title's blackly comic adventures has recently been collected in trade paperback.

"In 1983 Jerri Bartman was on her way to being a star of news coverage," Dastmalchian explains, discussing the series' acerbic protagonist. "She had a position at a news desk in Cleveland and was on her way to great things, but no one took her seriously when she was assaulted by the main news anchor. Her career is ruined and so she finds herself back in her small hometown in Missouri, drinking herself to death."

Bartman is so depressed, she finds herself unable to do her usual news work and is forced into taking a job as a late night horror host introducing trashy creature features. "She does it and, because of her gnarly attitude and her sense of humour, she is immediately a hit, people love her."

The new gig comes with a rather large catch, however. "Jerri quickly discovers that the guy she replaced was also one of the last appointed monster hunters on Earth. Monsters are real. They've been feeding fake information into the media for generations, so everything that we think we know about them is a lie – the ways to stop them, the ways to kill them, the ways to cure them. None of it is true."

"So she has to learn everything while keeping up the appearance of being a horror host and trying to figure out how to live her life without a bottle in hand, because as she quickly learns, trying to fight werewolves, vampires and zombies when you're drunk doesn't go so well."

As a horror fan himself, taking these supernatural threats seriously was important to Dastmalchian. "Monsters should be deadly, right? In *Count Crowley*, to kill a vampire is impossible. The only way to stop one is to carve the heart out of its chest, lock it in a box, bury the body somewhere else and hope and pray that they are never reunited! You have to chain a werewolf down and cut its tongue out. A zombie can't just be killed with a headshot. I wanted stopping a monster to be harder than anything Jerri has ever done, maybe almost as hard as quitting drinking."

Jerri's alcoholism is at the heart of the *Count Crowley* story and explored further in the second run. "I'm currently going into my 21st year of being clean and sober from drugs and alcohol," Dastmalchian says, frankly. "I also struggle with mental illness, and

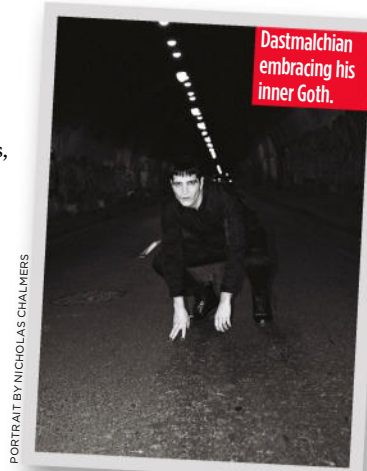
I have been working towards mental health for two decades now. I will say that, at the depths of my addiction, I was what society would probably describe as monstrous. I looked terrible. I smelled terrible. I was someone you couldn't trust."

It's clear that finding a better way forward is an important theme in the series – and not just for Jerri herself. "She's the first monster hunter to recognise that there might be another path. Like, why do we have to kill this werewolf? Couldn't we see if there's some way to help him? That's gonna be a big plot point going forward."

Talking to Dastmalchian, it's obvious how much a part of his life genre is. His office is a treasure trove of memorabilia, including photos of beloved horror hosts, various statues, posters and comic long boxes. He cites *The British Paranormal Society*, Rodney Barnes's *Killadelphia* and Al Ewing's *Immortal Hulk* as recent favourites, but his love of the comics medium goes all the way back to childhood and being gifted *The Avengers* 249 by his father.

"I have it up there on my shelf," he gestures. "The Avengers vs Maelstrom. I was hooked. And then I started going into a comic book shop in Kansas City and I fell in love with old horror comics, things like *Famous Monsters* and *Where The Monsters Dwell*. I love the artwork. I love the stories. And now I have one of my own to add to the mix!" **WS**

*Count Crowley: Amateur Midnight Monster Hunter* is available now from Dark Horse Comics.



PHOTOGRAPH BY NICHOLAS CHALMERS



## WALKER WATCH

### NEWS FROM THE WALKING DEAD UNIVERSE

- A release date has been set for New York-set spin off *The Walking Dead: Dead City* – it will premiere on AMC on 18 June.
- The series features an older, recast Herschel played by Logan Kim, replacing child actor Kien Michael Spiller.
- New additions to the cast include Gaius Charles (*Grey's Anatomy*) and Željko Ivanek (*Damages*).
- Ivanek plays a character called The Croat, who took Herschel.
- Charles plays Marshall Perlie Armstrong, "a devoted family man who is ruthless and unyielding in the pursuit of what he believes is justice."
- Charles said: "My main task, my main goal and objective, is to bring justice to our land, to our community, to protect it. And one of the biggest challenges is getting this guy named Negan."
- Further casting includes Jonathan Higginbotham (*The Blacklist*) as Tommaso, Michael Anthony (*The Game*) as Luther, Mahina Napoleon (*NCIS: Hawai'i*) as Ginny and Trey Santiago-Hudson (*New Amsterdam*) as Jano.
- Filming continues in Jersey City, New Jersey for the Rick and Michonne spin-off series, where Andrew Lincoln has been spotted wearing a Civic Republic Military (CRM) jacket.
- Also spotted on set was Jadis actor Pollyanna McIntosh.
- The production has been given a temporary name of *The Walking Dead: Summit*.
- Victor Strand – played by Colman Domingo – has big changes in store for the eighth and final season of *Fear The Walking Dead*. Co-showrunner Ian Goldberg says "Strand may have the most drastic reinvention of any character on the show when we meet him".



► **SCI-FACT!** *Count Crowley* was inspired by horror host Crematia Mortem (Roberta Solomon), who presented KSHB 41's *Creature Feature*.



You're a crook,  
Captain Hook  
(Jude Law in  
crusty mode).

Alexander  
Molony is Peter  
Pan. In this  
film, at least.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

# Never Say Neverland

Don't Peter Panic! David Lowery's **Peter Pan & Wendy** is finally here



LIKE ITS CHARACTERS, *PETER Pan & Wendy* refused to grow up. The live-action remake of Walt Disney's animated classic first entered development back in 2016, and David Lowery – who, at the time, had just helmed the remake of *Pete's Dragon* – quickly set about scripting his Neverland tale. It took five years for cameras to start rolling and now, finally, the long-gestating project is finished. "It's rather surreal that it's actually done," Lowery, who directed *A Ghost Story* and *The Green Knight* between Disney movies, tells Red Alert. "It almost feels wrong to stop working on it."

Lowery has been enamoured with Pan since childhood, having first been exposed to JM

Barrie's story while watching Steven Spielberg's *ET*, in which Dee Wallace's mother reads the original book to a young Drew Barrymore. Next for Lowery came the 1954 musical version featuring Mary Martin (recorded for television), which made him wonder how people were actually flying.

Later, Spielberg struck again with *Hook*, released at the perfect time in Lowery's adolescence to become a childhood favourite. Then came the 2003 version, starring Jason Isaacs as Hook, which he holds in particularly high

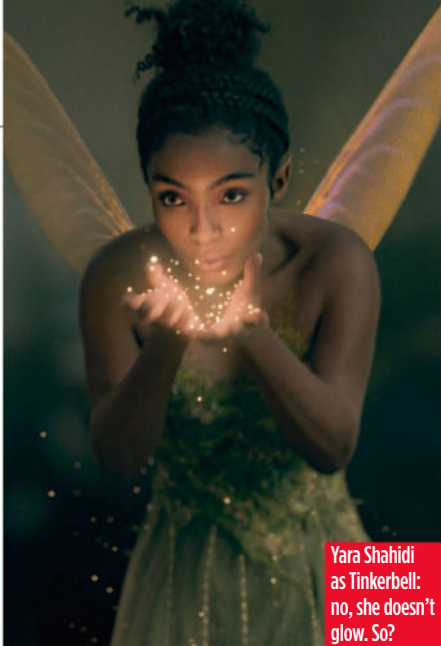
esteem: "It's so great that the only hesitation I had in signing up for this one was, how do you do it better than that? They captured the book so perfectly."

Above all, though, there was Disney's 1953 animated movie. Lowery's version, he says, is an "adaptation of all the best parts of that film, with plenty of intervention and reinvigoration."

It was the filmmaker's "guiding light" throughout the writing process, and he wanted to make sure that much of the iconography – such as Pan and Wendy flying over London – remained, while more dated aspects (like







Yara Shahidi as Tinkerbell: no, she doesn't glow. So?

the original's depiction of Neverland's natives) were removed or updated for modern times.

Following the release of the trailer, these changes were the biggest talking points. First there was the fact that the footage struck a particularly serious, grounded tone that felt different to the animation. "As a Peter Pan film, it's not going to surprise anyone who knows the original material," he says. "It's very fun and it's funny. If it's grounded, it's only because we were trying to shoot on location, build all of our sets, and have everything feel like a real place. I always value the idea that Neverland is

a place that a child could actually get to. As to whether it's a dark and gritty version of Peter Pan... it's not."

Another point of contention has been Lowery's version of the Lost Boys including girls. Certain sectors of the internet have even threatened to boycott the film over the change. "Movies should be for everybody," Lowery retorts. "And it doesn't change the movie at all. It's the same story everyone grew up with. To each their own, but it's their loss, they're going to miss out on a great movie-going experience."

"And I really am excited for kids who get to discover this tale for the first time and for this to be their version of the Lost Boys and Peter and Tinkerbell and Captain Hook and Wendy. The old versions are all going to be there. But for a certain generation, this will be their introduction to the story, and I'm really excited for it to be the one that they think of when they think of Peter Pan."

A less fractious but common response to the trailer has been the question of why Tinkerbell, the fairy played by Yara Shahidi, doesn't glow. "That's something that never even occurred to me," Lowery says. "We all imagine Tinkerbell glowing, but then you're like, 'Where's the light actually coming from? Do her wings light up?' That's the difference



"Yeah, you're gonna have to back it up a bit."

**“For a certain generation, this will be their introduction to the story, and I’m excited”**

between animation and what looks right in live-action."

Finally, despite Lowery admitting that he has mainly stayed away from the discourse, Red Alert brings up one final online annoyance: why isn't Jude Law's villainous Captain Hook hot? "What are they talking about?" he asks with amazement. "It's one shot! Wait to pass judgement until you see the rest."

What Lowery does want to highlight is comedian Jim Gaffigan's Mr Smee, Captain Hook's right hand man, who did not appear in the trailer. "He's a truly wonderful actor and getting to watch him bring Smee to life was a real gift. There's so much material that we shot with Jim that isn't in the movie. I wish we could just make it into a short film because he's not just a wonderful comedian, but an incredible dramatic actor."

A grounded, fun version of *Peter Pan & Wendy* from a critically acclaimed director? Internet be damned; take us back to Neverland right now. **JS**

*Peter Pan & Wendy is on Disney+ from 28 April.*



Wendy is played by the aptly named Ever Anderson.

**► SCI-FACT!** Everyone's favourite sci-fi icon Alan Tudyk appears in *Peter Pan & Wendy* as George Darling, Wendy's father.



CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

# Double Trouble

IDW brings *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* to comics in **Star Trek: Echoes**

➔ THERE'S SOMETHING very familiar about the antagonists in *Star Trek: Echoes*, IDW's new five-parter, which takes place just after 1979's *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. That's because the criminal mastermind and the bounty hunter pursuing them, who arrive from an alternate dimension, turn out to be spitting images of members of the Enterprise crew.

"Certainly, on its surface, we're making reference to the fact that we're meeting doppelgängers – specifically of Uhura and Chekov," says writer Marc Guggenheim of the title. "But we're also echoing the past by referencing the episode 'Mirror, Mirror', and I even have plans to echo the future in the fifth and final issue."

"When it comes to the differences between the doppelgängers and the original crew, readers will have to discover that for themselves," adds artist Oleg Chudakov. "I'll tell you for sure, readers will be taken on a trip to the bridge, visit the infirmary with McCoy and, of course, will shoot phasers!"

A firm fan of all things *Star Trek*, Guggenheim enjoyed exploring what is relatively untouched territory. "For me, the

Cover art for the first issue of *Echoes*, by Rod Reis.





most interesting aspect is how relatively untrod, unexamined, that particular period is, as there are a lot of unanswered questions," he says. "After all, Kirk was only provisionally given command of the *Enterprise* to deal with the V'ger threat. Similarly, McCoy only came out of retirement because Kirk – in McCoy's telling – 'drafted' him, so why did he stay in Starfleet? I jumped at the chance to give some of my answers.

"I'm extremely influenced by the way Nick Meyer and Harve Bennett directed and wrote the characters in *Star Trek II* and *III*. They have a lot more humour to them and they have a greater sense of connection, so you really feel like they're a true family. They've been through their five-year mission and there's a sense of familiarity to their interactions that, for my money, wasn't a part of the original series."

## “Akris, a war criminal from another universe, arrives in ours”

Admitting that “my first instinct was to come up with an answer that wouldn't spoil anything,” Guggenheim is actually very forthcoming. “I thought about what former Paramount president Sherry Lansing said to Leonard Nimoy and Harve Bennett when they complained about including the destruction of the *Enterprise* in the trailer for *The Search For Spock*: ‘Would you rather be surprised or would you rather people saw the movie?’

“I will say that although a potential shooting war with the Romulans is very much a looming threat throughout the series, it's not the result of a conspiracy. Rather, Akris, a war criminal from another universe, arrives in our universe and has a superweapon in his possession. Both Akris and the weapon end up in the hands of the Romulans and the *Enterprise* crew has to risk war in order to end the threat.” **SJ**

*Star Trek: Echoes* is out on 17 May.

### WRITER EXCLUSIVE

# Super Spy

Coinciding with the character's 60th anniversary, Al Ewing's **Fury** spans the many decades of Nick Fury's career



SIXTY YEARS AFTER Nick Fury's first appearance, Al Ewing is chronicling the different sides of both Fury Sr and Jr in a new one-shot. Described by the writer as “a fun little whistlestop tour through the eyes of his son,” the 40-pager takes in everything from the elder Fury's Second World War days in the *Howling Commandos* to his recent stint as the all-seeing Man on the Wall.

“It's one that hopefully leaves both of them in a place where more stories can be told about either one without compromising the other, although you'll have to see for yourself how I work that trick,” Ewing tells Red Alert. “It wouldn't be a *Fury* anniversary

special without both Nick Furies in the mix, and it's about time they had a bit more father/son bonding, so readers can expect plenty of that. And even within the bounds of Fury Sr, he's been so many different people at so many different times that he can play against himself in a way – though we don't go the whole *Doctor Who* route and have him meet himself!”

The Furies are pitted against Scorpio, who once led criminal cartel Zodiac. “Scorpio is a person, not an organisation, but I thought Fury could do with another organisation or two to fight,” explains Ewing. “HYDRA is his main foil, but HYDRA is pure evil, and if you're not pure evil, you don't join HYDRA. The thing about that is when the

friendly agency and the enemy agency have to team up, or when the secret agent has a steamy affair with their glamorous opposite number. But you can't really do that with HYDRA, as heroes really shouldn't have glamorous affairs with fascists. So I thought I'd better create some new people to oppose, who Fury could kiss.”

With Ewing teasing that he's “dropped hints,” *Fury* also ties in with his recent miniseries *Wasp*, as well as 2019's *Marvel 1000*. “This doesn't lead anywhere I immediately know of, though I am doing my usual thing of scattering my apple seeds and seeing if they grow into trees,” says Ewing. “Even if nobody else waters them, I know I'll get back to them eventually. As for *Marvel 1000*, there are thematic resonances with that, and with *Ant-Man*. People who enjoyed those will get something out of this, but there's no direct connection. This functions as a standalone issue.”

Each era is illustrated by a different artist, ranging from Adam Kubert to Scot Eaton and Ramon Rosanas. “They're all wonderful!” says Ewing. “Every time a new page comes into the inbox, it's happy time. I won't lie to you; the issue was an absolute bear to write, and each of the different sections had its own challenges involved. But it's an absolute blast seeing how each of them is transforming the script in their own style to create something unforgettable.” **SJ**

*Fury* issue one is out on 24 May.



Cover art for *Fury* issue one, by Adam Kubert.



SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

# Twin Terrors

David Cronenberg's thriller **Dead Ringers** is adapted into a chilling limited series



When a child is born... it's all downhill from here.



IN 1988, DAVID CRONENBERG unleashed *Dead Ringers* into cinemas; a dark, twisted tale of codependent twins that set back women's trust in gynaecology a few decades. It's since become a classic in his varied and strange body of work, earning many high profile admirers, including actor Rachel Weisz.

About four years ago, Weisz was looking for a project with a complex female relationship at the centre of it and thought about how gender-flipping the twins Elliot and Beverly Mantle in *Dead Ringers* would turn that whole story on its head. Annapurna Television agreed and brought in British screenwriter Alice Birch (*Normal People*, *Succession*) to develop it into a six-episode limited series.

With Weisz playing the twins and also part of the writers' room, Birch tells Red Alert that she got the singular opportunity to craft a series with her lead actor by her side. "I hadn't done this before, really creating two characters with the actor who would play those

characters," she says. "Every scene and every line was a challenge of, how can I write something for her that's worthy of her, and what's going to be complicated enough? But that was thrilling, and some of those ideas came from her, or were things that she wanted to try."

Elliot Mantle is the feisty one of the pair of twins.



In particular, Birch says they wanted to present two messy, complicated women working in a maternal field, yet who aren't particularly wholesome in their pursuits or inclinations. "Elliot has a huge appetite," Birch explains. "She's an amazingly efficient pleasure-seeker. She's really enviable in that she knows what she wants, so she gets it. She feels satisfied and moves on to the next thing."

"I think she's very happy in the relationship with her sister. It's all working and she likes things just as they are. Whereas Beverly is trying to crack a window. I think she's just looking for a little more air. She's a slightly more troubled soul."

The series adaptation doesn't shy away from its Cronenbergian roots in terms of tone, aesthetics or its frank depictions of women's fertility, pregnancy and sexuality. Birch says the two things that primarily drove their take on the premise were, firstly, the female twins' codependent relationship and their shadow selves. "It's so complex and they love each





Rachel Weisz (left), with Rachel Weisz (right).

## “Elliot has a huge appetite... She’s an amazingly efficient pleasure-seeker”

other so much. But there’s also that kind of shadow side to that all the time,” she says. “It was about being able to really draw that story out and think about their childhoods, where they came from, what their ambitions might be and how this relationship can survive. How can the two of them continue on this track, or what needs to change?”

Secondly, there’s the introduction of an outsider in the form of Beverly’s patient, actor Genevieve (Britne Oldford). “We really stole her from the film because people really loved the character of Claire in the film, so we’ve named Genevieve in homage to the amazing Geneviève Bujold,” Birch explains. “That gave [the series] a real engine, that this person could come and disrupt their relationship.”

As for the horror, that comes via the twins’ profession and Beverly’s pursuit of a Birthing Centre where she wants to explore more options in women’s health and fertility. From the pilot on, the series shines a bright and often uncomfortable light at the graphic qualities to women’s health and fertility. Birch says that every day in the writers’ room they

would uncover “very real, frightening, violent stories” about the process of fertility and childbirth.

“But also, hopeful and joyful stories too,” she adds. “We wanted this to feel very grounded at the beginning. Like we could really imagine that those two women are walking in and out of a hospital in Manhattan with patients and stories that we would recognise as truthful, because then, hopefully, we can go on a bit of a journey to somewhere more heightened.”

Part of that is depicting their work in a manner that doesn’t coddle an audience, and which also reinforces and reflects the twins’ different attitudes.

“We never wanted it to be gratuitous or just there in order to shock,” Birch says of the more graphic scenes. “We also didn’t want it to be there to lecture or make anyone feel worse. It is just about, how can we tell this as truthfully and honestly and authentically, as long as it’s serving our story?”

Asked whether the TV version of *Dead Ringers* will ultimately follow the same outcome the film depicts, Birch says not entirely. But in her mind, this series was always meant to be finite. “There are millions more stories to tell about women and people in this medical system, but this has always been a limited series.” **TB**

*Dead Ringers* is on Prime Video from 21 April.



Warning, kids: boozing and science don’t mix.



Genevieve (Britne Oldford) gets frisky.



## NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Set phasers to cancellation: **Star Trek: Discovery** to end after season five.

→ *Chernobyl*’s Johan Renck directing **The Day Of The Trifids** for Amazon Studios.

→ Jon Bernthal returning as the Punisher in **Daredevil: Born Again**.

→ **Willow** axed after just one season on Disney+.

→ *Supergirl*’s Melissa Benoist replacing Sarah Michelle Gellar as voice of Teela in **Masters Of The Universe: Revolution**.

→ Clancy Brown playing mob boss Salvatore Maroni in **The Penguin**.

→ Netflix rumoured to be developing US remake of **Squid Game**.

→ Ciaran Hinds and Rory Kinnear joining season two of **The Rings Of Power**.

→ *Shadow And Bone* showrunners working on a **Six Of Crows** spin-off series.

→ *Homeland*’s Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa developing series based on 1997’s **Gattaca**.

→ Jodie Comer reportedly in the frame for **Blade Runner 2099**.

→ Andrew Garfield, Oscar Isaac and Mia Goth circling Guillermo del Toro’s **Frankenstein**.



SCOTT DUDERSON/GETTY

► **SCI-FACT!** Sean Durkin (*Martha Marcy May Marlene*) and Karyn Kusama (*Jennifer’s Body*) each direct episodes.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

# Vampire Vacation

It's Cajun chaos for **Buffy** as she discovers New Orleans' supernatural side

➔ CLAIMING THAT SHE USED SOME “very dark and forbidden magic!” when pitching one-shot *Lost Summer* to her editor Elizabeth Brei, writer Casey Gilly is sending Buffy and gang on holiday to New Orleans – although typically for the vampire slayer, it isn't long before she encounters some bloodsuckers.

“It came from my love of the vacation episodes of sitcoms, like when the Brady Bunch went to Hawaii, or when *Parks And Recreation* went to London,” Gilly tells Red Alert. “I love the idea of taking very familiar characters out of their normal setting and putting them through the gauntlet of a vacation. Even though these are supposed to be fun trips, no one is having a good time all the time. While Buffy can rally her friends to decide how to attack a demon, I wondered how hard of a time she'd have getting everyone to agree on where to eat dinner. It presented such a fun, ridiculous, low-stakes story to play with and I just couldn't resist.”

With Gilly describing it as “one of my very favourite US cities”, the Big Easy made for a natural location. “I used to go every year with my husband and son, but we haven't made it back since Covid started. And anyway, as an elder Goth, I'm basically required to set one vampire story in New Orleans every year or I lose my Goth privileges...”

The trip occurs after Spike discovers that the last remaining journal of William the Bloody's poetry is for sale at an antiques fair. “He absolutely cannot have that getting out, can he? He's worked so hard to become Spike – can you imagine how embarrassing it would be if that book got into the wrong hands?”

After stumbling upon some old clothing belonging to some casquette girls – women who were forcibly brought out to Louisiana's French colonies to be brides – Dawn utters a wish, which

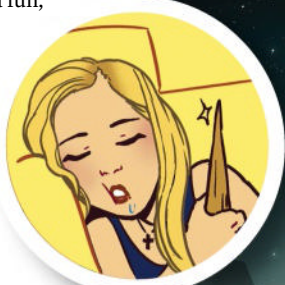
uncover a supernatural secret. “When they got off the boats, they looked like they'd been through hell, and they had been. They each carried a small wooden box, a casquette, with their few possessions, which was all too much for everyone,” explains Gilly. “Pale, sickly women carrying caskets? The only logical explanation is that they were vampires!”

The women's possessions were apparently stored in trunks at an Ursuline convent, although the belongings soon went missing, despite the room being securely locked. “That's absolute vampire shit!” continues Gilly. “As the story goes, the nuns sealed up the room with everything they could find, including nails blessed by the Pope. So you have early American vampire lore disguising the mistreatment of women at the hands of men in

charge, which seemed like a perfect fit for a Buffy story.”

Gilly enjoyed working with both artist Lauren Knight and colourist Francesco Segala. “Lauren has an incredible sense of humour in her art and no matter how much weird, silly stuff I threw at her, she turned it into something beautiful,” she says. “And Francesco perfectly captured the range of locations, from Buffy's dim basement to the American southwest to the lush Crescent City.” **SJ**

*Buffy: Lost Summer* is out on 3 May.



Main cover art for *Lost Summer*, by Mirka Andolfo.





► **SCI-FACT!** Created by Arnold Drake, Bob Haney and Bruno Premiani, *Doom Patrol* first appeared in *My Greatest Adventure* 80 in June 1963.

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

# Band Of Outsiders

*Lazarus Planet*'s most offbeat spin-off sees the return of DC misfits **Doom Patrol**

► SPRINGING OUT OF the recent *Lazarus Planet* crossover, DC's misfit outfit are returning in a new miniseries, and this time they're unstoppable.

"Their new mission statement is 'Saving the world by saving the monsters', and to put it bluntly they're not letting anyone get in their way," writer Dennis Culver tells Red Alert. "Lazarus resin rains down all over the world, causing all sorts of mayhem, magical and otherwise. There are now more people with active metagenes, aka metahumans, than ever before."

Featuring the classic line-up's Robotman, Elasti-Woman and Negative Man, *Doom Patrol*'s current ranks also have a couple of new additions, including a new Chief. "I definitely wanted to fill all the archetypal roles of the original *Doom Patrol*, so Cliff, Rita and Larry are a given," explains Culver.

"But it didn't feel right having Niles Caulder, the original Chief, once again lead this team after his role in causing the accidents that gave the core team their disabilities. So, after thinking on it a bit I came up with Crazy Jane and her alternate identities putting forward one of their own as the new chief of the *Doom Patrol*. Her orange facemask is meant to evoke Caulder's beard and help her fill that role."

And rather than previous incumbent Beast Boy, Culver and artist Chris Burnham introduce Beast Girl. "I thought it would be

great to have a young character join the team as well, like Beast Boy in the original series, but Gar has obviously grown and flourished as a member of Titans making him more essential there than he ever was on this team," reasons Culver. "So, I started

scribbling ideas for a Beast Girl and sent them over to Burnham. He took those ideas and came back with this adorable character that came to life in my mind."

"I also demanded a cute little monster to draw, who you'll meet in issue two," adds Burnham. "So

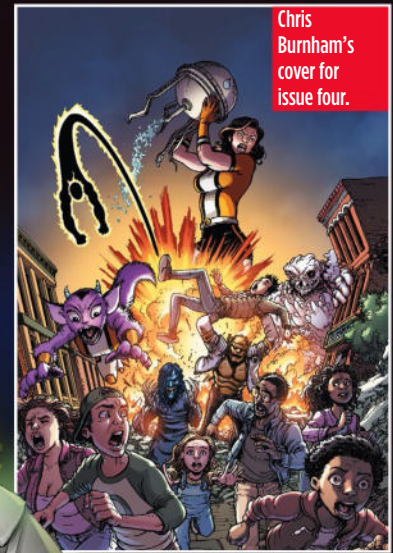
enter the Worm – I love that little critter!"

Burnham previously collaborated with Grant Morrison, who wrote a seminal *Doom Patrol* run in the late '80s. "As I re-read Grant and Richard Case's run for the umpteenth time, it occurred to me that the overall vibe is 'William Burroughs presents Clive Barker's *Doctor Who*,'" he says.

"I absolutely love it, but that's not what we're going for." There's also a subplot involving classic *Doom Patrol* villains Monsieur Mallah and the Brain. "Even though this is a six-issue series, the plan if sales permit is to do six issues every year with Burnham drawing them, like a prestige television season," says Culver. "Because of that we've structured the series a little differently than a six-parter, which is usually one story."

"The first four issues will be episodic done-in-ones that allow us to explore the new premise for the team as well as focus on our characters. Running through those will be the subplot of the Brain, Mallah and Immortus which ends in a two-parter in issues five and six." **sj**

*Unstoppable Doom Patrol* issue one is out now.



Chris Burnham's cover for issue four.







David Tennant and Lenny Henry in Comic Relief.

## SFX SPACE AND TIME Celebrating 60 years of DOCTOR WHO

◆ **Production on season 14 continues** – Russell T Davies appeared on Michael Ball's Radio 2 show recently and said: "I watched episode four last night and I think it's one of the greatest things I've ever made in my life, so I'm very, very happy with it. It's looking so good, Michael, I love it."

◆ The director of the episode, Dylan Holmes Williams, responded to this comment on Twitter, saying: "As the lucky man who got to direct this incredible script, I've got to say I'm very excited about what we created."

◆ **Julie Gardner recently said about production on the new series and Russell:** "He's writing amongst his best-ever work. The scripts are big and extremely ambitious. The only worry I ever have is that we get it right for him. We run to keep up."

◆ David Tennant appeared in The Fourteenth Doctor's outfit in a sketch with Lenny Henry for

Comic Relief on 17 March. In the scene, Henry – who played the Doctor in a 1985 sketch on *The Lenny Henry Show* – regenerated into Tennant, who repeated his lines from the closing moments of "The Power Of The Doctor".

◆ **A Dalek also appeared on Comic Relief, during a Eurovision sketch where it was judged by Lulu.**

◆ The BBC announced *Doom's Day*, a new event series spanning "books, comics, audio and more". The official website said: "This special multi-platform story will celebrate *Doctor Who*'s 60th anniversary by introducing a brand-new character on a 24-hour pursuit of the Doctor."

Sooz Kempner is Doom. That's not a dis, by the way.



◆ Sooz Kempner said: "To be part of the *Doctor Who* universe, a British institution up there with cups of tea and James Bond, is surreal and amazing! I love everything about Doom and can't believe I get to travel across time and space with her."

◆ *Doom's Day* will begin on *Doctor Who* digital channels soon, followed by products from *Doctor Who Magazine*, Titan Comics, Penguin Random House, East Side Games, Big Finish and BBC Audio, each telling a section of Doom's story from one of the 24 hours that she has left. The finale will then also be released on *Doctor Who* digital channels. ☪

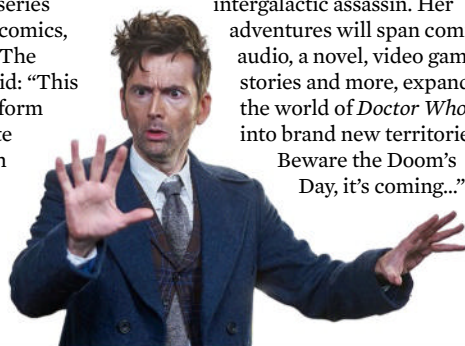
*Doctor Who* is on BBC One and Disney+ from November.

◆ **Comedian Sooz Kempner plays Doom, the universe's greatest assassin, who will pursue the Doctor over 24 hours in a bid to escape**

**Death. On the journey "fan favourites" are promised.**

◆ Russell T Davies said: "*Doom's Day* is a huge new adventure for the whole *Doctor Who* universe – starring the brilliant and hilarious Sooz Kempner as an

intergalactic assassin. Her adventures will span comics, audio, a novel, video games stories and more, expanding the world of *Doctor Who* into brand new territories. Beware the Doom's Day, it's coming..."



Ncuti Gatwa: still the new Doctor.

© BBC, DAVID EMERY, RAY BURRISTON, WOLF MARLOH

► **SCI-FACT!** Dylan Holmes William has previously directed episodes of M Night Shyamalan's *Servant*.



► **SCI-FACT!** Ricou Browning once had to chase a snapping turtle to retrieve part of the Gill-man's foot.

NEW AUTHOR

## NADIA ATTIA

MEET THE BFI TALENT  
EXECUTIVE BEHIND FOLK  
HORROR ROAD TRIP *VERGE*



LOUISE HAYWOOD-SCHIEFER

### Tell us about your protagonists.

→ Rowena is headstrong and troubled, convinced that Death is stalking her; Halim is repressed and burning with anger at how the world treats him. I created them as opposites – she's an English rose from a modest background, he's an Egyptian "outsider" with wealth in the family – though both share the desire for freedom.

### Does the book have any specific political themes?

→ I was partly inspired by Brexit and wanted to explore how toxic division can be. I wouldn't describe *Verge* as a dystopian novel, but the unforgiving land and its hardened people provide plenty of challenges for our heroes.

### Did you have to do much research?

→ I researched folk beliefs and superstitions, read about curses and their bizarre remedies, herb lore and agriculture (at one point I was being served job ads for tractor drivers). I

discovered secret societies, and made up my own rituals and folk songs!

### Any advice for would-be authors?

→ Don't be too hard on yourself if you can't write every day – that's a luxury for those of us who have demanding jobs and other responsibilities. Do what you can and enjoy the process.

### What are you working on next?

→ Another spec-fiction tale touched by death and the supernatural, this time set in the past. It's partly inspired by Pamela Colman Smith, illustrator of the most famous tarot deck.

*Verge* is out on 11 May, published by *Serpent's Tail*.



## THE FINAL FRONTIER

# RICOU BROWNING

1930-2023

From the depths he came...



UNLEASHED IN 1954'S *CREATURE* From *The Black Lagoon*, the Gill-man was the final addition to Universal's classic pantheon of horror icons. And Ricou Browning, who played the beast in the movie's memorable underwater sequences, outlived co-fiends Karloff, Lugosi and Chaney Jr to become the last of the golden age horror stars.

Born in Fort Pierce, Florida, Browning had a lifelong affinity for the water, competing as a youth in local springboard competitions and emerging as a star of the USAF swimming team. After serving as a lifeguard at Wakulla Springs, he was recruited to help scout locations for *Creature*.

The filmmakers were so impressed by his swimming prowess that they offered him \$600 a week to play the amphibious menace itself (Ben Chapman was the monster on land – to preserve a sense of mystery, neither performer was credited). With perilously limited visibility, the costume presented a challenge –

"like swimming in an overcoat", as Browning put it. But he compared it to wearing American football gear: "At first it's bulky and cumbersome. But then, when you go in the game and you start to play, you don't even know you have it on."

The Gill-man was a hit and Browning encored in 1955's *Revenge Of The Creature* – Clint Eastwood's big-screen debut – and 1956's *The Creature Walks Among Us*, which abandoned the waning 3D gimmick of the first two movies.

He later forged a career as a second unit director, handling the impressive underwater sequences in Bond capers *Thunderball* and *Never Say Never Again*, and co-created popular kids' TV series *Flipper*.

"I get fan mail almost every day," he revealed in 1994, "and lots of calls from people who say, 'We're having a party. Could you bring your rubber suit over and jump in the pool and scare everybody?'" **NS**



The Gill-man, and the man inside the costume.

ART COLLECTION / ALAMY, BETTMANN/GETTY

## BERT I GORDON

1922-2023

American producer behind *The Amazing Colossal Man* and *Empire Of The Ants*.

## CHRISTOPHER FOWLER

1953-2023

British novelist who also created the tagline "In space, no one can hear you scream."



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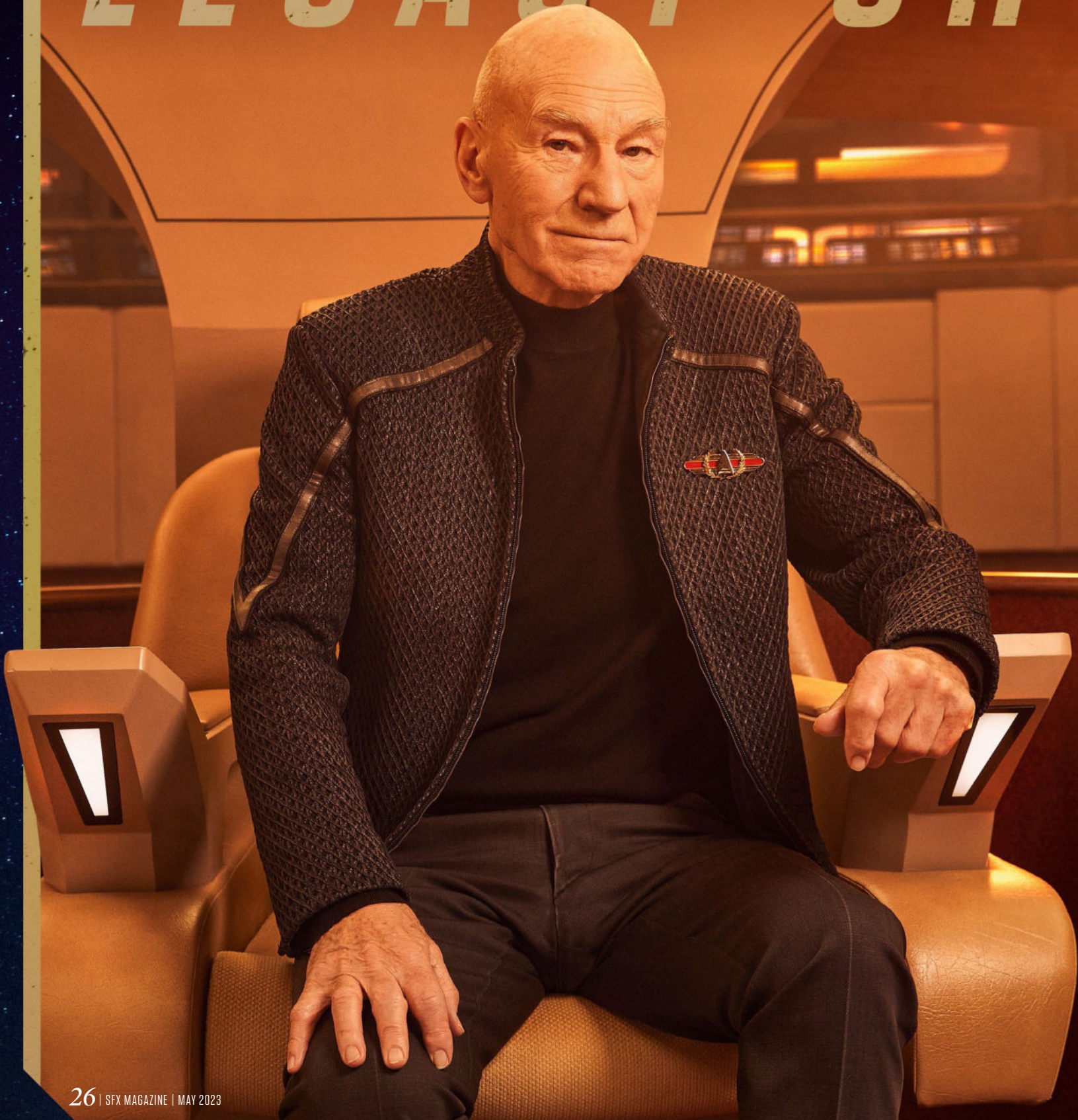
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STAR TREK: PICARD

# LEGACY CH





# CHARACTERS

## WARNING! SPOILER BREACH IMMINENT!

### TERRY MATALAS LOOKS BACK ON HIS EPIC SEASON OF STAR TREK: PICARD

WORDS: DARREN SCOTT



**O**NCE AGAIN – THIS IS YOUR LAST CHANCE – DO NOT READ THIS FEATURE IF YOU WANT TO AVOID SPOILERS FOR THE END OF SEASON THREE OF *STAR TREK: PICARD*.

Still here? Then let's... engage.

Just how long has showrunner Terry Matalas had this epic storyline in his head? "A while," he considers, "but I never thought anyone would ever let me write it. It was just always this idea percolating in the back of my head that if Picard ever had a kid, he would have passed on this Locutus gene. At best I thought it might be a comic book I could write someday."

Yes, it was the Borg all along. "We've been hiding it in plain sight," Matalas says. "The very first dialogue in the entire season is a log entry from 'The Best Of Both Worlds' by Picard, talking about the Borg, that young Jack Crusher was listening to, his father's logs. We've kept the story of the Borg and Locutus alive in the narrative for this very reason."

How does Matalas feel about the fan campaign to make *Star Trek: Legacy* – his idea for a show that would continue the exploits of the former Titan crew – a reality?

"I mean, I love it. And this would be it," he says of the final setup. "Shaw does not make it out alive. However, we do have plans for a Shaw character – specifically Todd Stashwick – to be a part of *Legacy* that I can't talk about, but we always knew we would never do that show without Todd. So we had plans in place for that, should it ever happen. But there's nothing in development, unfortunately."

We asked Matalas what each episode of the season meant to him...

#### THE NEXT GENERATION

We knew, when we shot that first scene with Shaw, that we had something really special. That dinner scene, we knew that that was a really special dynamic that fans were going to

love. But we never could have anticipated this kind of love. We didn't anticipate him becoming a meme.

#### DISENGAGE

That's the moment Ed Speleers really comes into fruition. That's when we knew how phenomenal he was as an actor. Specifically, I think about that moment in the jail cell with him and Patrick. That was the moment we knew that it was going to work, that they had a singular chemistry, that he could hold his own against Patrick, and that the entire season was gonna work. It was such a great relief, watching Ed work that day.

#### SEVENTEEN SECONDS

That is Gates McFadden's tour de force. Her big return as Beverly Crusher in that very long intense scene with Patrick. She's just so phenomenal. It's a very difficult first meeting scene to pull off and she crushed it [*Nice work - Puns Editor*]. And again, if that scene didn't work, the season didn't work.

#### NO WIN SCENARIO

When I think about that, I think about Todd Stashwick's brilliant performance in his Wolf 359 monologue. I think about the sense of wonder in Steven Barton's beautiful score for the space babies at the end. The end of the first act of our season, as the music swells, and the faces of the crew of the Titan awash in that blue light – that is one of my favourite moments of the season, without question.

#### IMPOSTERS

The return of Ro Laren, the reunion too long in the making. Again, I always wondered why she never turned up in any of the features.

Both Michelle and Patrick were so phenomenal in those scenes. And I'm so grateful we got to do that story as part of the last story of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. [It was] tremendously difficult [to keep cameos] →





LeVar Burton signs off as Geordi La Forge.



Brent Spiner as Data, eternally curious.



Jonathan Frakes as Will Riker (and as director).

secret]. Because obviously everybody wants to promote the show and drop all this stuff in the trailers. And it's a lot of discussion about, "How can we keep this as a delicious surprise for the fans?"

### THE BOUNTY

The return of LeVar Burton and Brent Spiner. It started to truly feel like *Star Trek 11* as a feature film. And the chance for Geordi La Forge to be a different kind of Geordi, to be a father, to do different kinds of scene work, was really delightful. And for Brent Spiner to play multiple parts in the span of 45 seconds is really incredible to watch and shows the calibre of the actors we're dealing with here. That was really phenomenal.

### DOMINION

That one belongs to Amanda Plummer. Just one of the finest actors to grace the screen, and we were so very lucky to have her chewing up the scenery like that. She embraced it in every way possible. Such a wonderful collaborator and a delight to work with. It's essentially a one-woman show for an entire act of television.

[The return of Tuvok] was great for me personally, as someone who worked with him back in the day on *Voyager*,

and it was wonderful to be able to reunite Jeri and Tim one more time.

### SURRENDER

A very intense episode with a lot of storylines that need to come together by the end. Frakes and Marina have maybe some of my favourite Riker and Troi stuff I've ever seen. They're so wonderful together, bringing so much of themselves into the role, they make me cry every time I watch those scenes. And Brent playing against himself as Lore is really something to behold. Those final scenes where *The Next Generation* is finally reunited and around that table, and the promise of the next two hours to come, is what this is all about.

### VOX

Obviously, it's tragic: we lose Shaw, the Borg have taken Starfleet. It's about as high-stakes as it could ever be for Starfleet. It's a *Star Trek* movie. And it's really all about those last seven minutes aboard the Enterprise-D.

Building that set, getting it finished in time, shooting it and reuniting that cast on that set... there were a lot of tears shed – blood, sweat and tears – to make all that happen, but it was worth it. And it's pretty much the ultimate cliffhanger for this show.

### THE LAST GENERATION

It's a giant movie – it's about as big a *Star Trek* movie as anyone could ask for. And it was an honour to be able to write it.

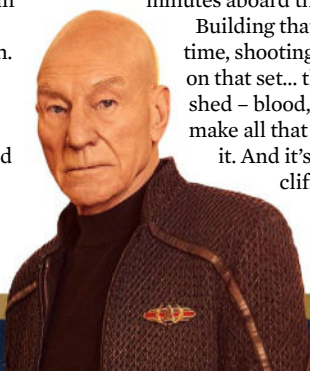
But really, it's about a father and a son coming together. In order for Picard to save his son, Picard has to essentially allow himself to become assimilated one last time. He assimilates himself, essentially, to go into the collective so that he can have this conversation to get through to Jack. And it's a super-emotional moment.

Essentially a self-sacrifice, although Picard survives. It's really all about Picard fully embracing himself as a father, and disregarding everything else but that.

### CAST REACTIONS TO THE SETS

On the day of the Enterprise-D, that was an extraordinary feeling for all of them, to be back on that set. Because we built it exactly how it was, going back to the original blueprints, going back to the original designers – we brought Mike and Denise Okuda back. Even the grain of wood on the arch was hand-painted to match *exactly* as it was in the day.

So there wasn't a detail missed. It was extraordinary for the actors to be back there in that space, and they immediately all went to their stations. It was kind of adorable. That is







Jeri Ryan's  
Seven of Nine:  
a new boss is  
in town.



Michael Dorn  
as Worf:  
steady there,  
old thing.



Gates  
McFadden and  
Ed Speleers as  
the Crushers.

the only set from season three that has been saved, and I believe the Roddenberry archives have it.

### ON KILLING LEGACY CHARACTERS

It's nebulous as to whether [Admiral Shelby] dies or not. She might survive it. She certainly is wounded pretty bad. It's one of these things, it's quite likely that we may never come back and do this again. In the case of Ensign Ro, there's actually a few seconds in which her comms turn off where, in theory, she could have been beamed off of that shuttle.

So there is a plausible deniability to all these things. You never want to be callous about it, right? We don't do it for bloodsport. So we do leave it open. However, it is a show with dramatic stakes and if you don't feel like anyone could die at any moment, then what's the point of any of this drama?

Bringing back Shelby was a real treat. Elizabeth Dennehy was just an unbelievable professional, had this great monologue and just had it down pat from second one. I wish we could have done more with her.

### ON SIR PATRICK REVISITING THE BORG

In this context, he was open to it, because it was about his son. I think he wasn't about revisiting the Borg for Borg's sake. It was

about what we passed on generationally – generational trauma and about one generation from the next – and I think that's a different kind of story. The Borg have a similar thing too – for the Borg Queen, she has a kind of maternal ownership over Jack too. From her perspective, that's her son. If she hadn't assimilated Picard back then, this new evolution of Borg would not have happened. It was not her intention. It was a kind of accident. So from her perspective, this is her kid too.

### ON THE FUTURE OF PICARD

These shows are expensive to make. They currently have two shows, with *Strange New Worlds* and *Starfleet Academy* [beginning production in 2024] and I think Paramount would have to financially justify a third one. I think the way they look at it is that they're well-stocked. So unless fans can convince them otherwise, that's certainly the point of view at the moment.

### ON THE PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

From the beginning of the season, I said to them, "How amazing would it be to end the series with Seven of Nine as the captain of the Enterprise and Raffi's her First Officer, the new Number One." Obviously, that meant their relationship would have to be put on hold for

Starfleet regulations, which would have upset some fans. But my god, what incredible queer visibility to have them be at the forefront of the most important starship in all of *Star Trek* legacy. So we all discussed that, and we knew that that would be our North Star.

For Jeri, specifically, to be able to tell that journey, to be able to get her in that chair... and by god, does she look like she belongs there. She has the Kirk lean and the swagger. There is no one more suited to be in a captain's chair than Jeri Ryan. And it absolutely demands its own show. I feel so good to be able to have made that happen. And it's the right ship. She's the right captain for the right ship. And the right ending. It's the right torch to be passed to the right person, I feel.

### ON WHERE WE LEAVE THE NEXT GENERATION

Beverly Crusher becomes the new Admiral of Starfleet medical. I presume that Riker is also due for a promotion to Admiralty at this point. It feels like Deanna is also an active Starfleet counsellor again; Data seems to be a part of active duty, as well as Worf. So it does feel like the gang is out in the world again doing things, which is, I feel, how you want to leave them. In my head canon you always like to feel like your heroes go on and continue. They all could be and would be part of *Legacy* if we could. ●



## UNLIKE HIS ON-SCREEN PERSONA, TODD STASHWICK IS VERY EXCITED TO BE ON BOARD THE TITAN WITH THE CAST OF STAR TREK: PICARD

WORDS: DARREN SCOTT



**T**HE GENESIS OF LIAM SHAW, Captain of the USS Titan-A, goes back almost a decade, to when *Star Trek: Picard* showrunner Terry Matalas cast Todd Stashwick on Syfy series *12 Monkeys*. “We immediately got on like we’ve known each other our whole lives,” the actor recalls.

It was August 2021 when Matalas contacted his friend and said, “So we’ve got a role for you in season three of *Picard* that we’re writing.” Stashwick says his immediate response was, “Well, great, I can’t wait to see who’s going to play it...” joking that things never pan out when people say they’re writing a role for you. “But Terry being a man of his word, about a month later, I got all the paperwork and was showing up for my fitting.”

He laughs when he recalls that fateful day. “I walked in and on the wall, they had all of the concept art and they had Photoshopped my big noggin on to my captain’s uniform. Already, I was over the moon.

“My first action figures in 1974 were Spock, Kirk and McCoy. So *Star Trek* has been in my blood since 1974. If somebody had told that kid in ’74 he would be wearing the uniform, I would have said, ‘Yeah, that totally tracks.’ Because I was playing *Star Trek* back then. So there’s not much difference between 50-something me playing *Star Trek* now,” he says.

Regarding those figures, he gives a knowing look and states, “Don’t think that I don’t have them again.” As for potentially being a *Star Trek* figure himself? “Then I will just walk into the ocean because all will be complete.”

### MONKEYING AROUND

Shaw’s not an immediately likeable character; from his first meeting with Picard and Riker, he makes it perfectly clear that he’s not impressed with the Starfleet legends.

“Working with Terry and also some other *12 Monkeys* writers, Chris Monfette and Sean Tretta, these guys were very in tune with my style and what I do as an actor and what I bring to the table, and so it was very much written in my voice. It was hand in glove.

“When I stepped onto the set, and when I read those scripts, I already knew what it was going to be. It was such a comfortable role to step into, and not without the challenge. →



# CAPTAIN ON THE BRIDGE



STAR TREK: PICARD  
TODD STASHWICK







Stashwick with Jeri Ryan as Seven of Nine.



"Oh, you've got some little toys. Good for you."



The kind of depth that this guy has, and all the notes that I was being asked to play. It just felt right, immediately."

He says that playing an unfriendly character against such an established ensemble probably made the experience easier.

"It wasn't that feeling that you often get when you're a guest star and you're not wanting to disrupt the furniture in someone else's house. They immediately let me know this was my house too. So that laid the fabric for my experience. Then because my character did not see these characters as higher status than himself, that's where the fun came in.

"I'm talking to these not only legendary actors, but legendary characters, and they are not legends to my character. In fact, quite the opposite. So to be able to lean into his disdain for them was really fun, and to just step right up and be completely unimpressed by them – in character – I think somehow made it easier."

So much easier, in fact, that Stashwick quickly found himself part of an established "found family".

"There was one great moment I got to share," he enthuses. "I'm sitting there in the captain's chair in-between takes and Patrick is sitting right next to me. Somebody comes over and starts playfully choking Patrick, and I look up and it was Brent [Spiner]. Then Brent looks at me and then Patrick looks at me and goes, 'Oh, have you met Todd Stashwick?' and then

with his conspiratorial voice, he says to Brent," – he breaks into a remarkably good impression of Patrick Stewart – "He's one of us'. And I fainted. It was great. I felt I was knighted by the knight."

The relationship with Stewart's on-screen persona is something quite different, given Shaw's history with the Borg and experiences at Wolf 359 – which all comes to a head in an astonishing scene on the Titan's holodeck.

"That was part of Terry's pitch to me..." Stashwick corrects himself. "Not that he pitched me, like he was trying to get me on board. It was like, 'Would you like to be on *Star Trek*?' 'Yes. Oh god, please. Yes, I will pour Earl Grey tea hot, whatever you need,'" he laughs.

"But he was telling me about the character and what the plans were for this guy." He pauses. "Let me back up. I watched 'The Best Of Both Worlds' back in the day when I was living with my best friend Oliver in Chicago. *TNG* was appointment television when I was a young actor in the early '90s. So these episodes loomed large in my nerd history.

"So now, when I was reading that monologue – and again, what a gift for an actor to just sink his teeth into – I was placing myself on one of those ships in that episode. You're going, 'Oh my god, young Liam is in the engine room on one of these ships during this assault, this battle, alone.' It recontextualised things for me, Todd. I know what the battle looked like from



Everyone's really happy to have Shaw on board.

"Yeah, well, I'm Ten of Ten, and don't forget it."







"Make it, so?  
Make it, so...  
Make it so?  
Make. It. So."

the outside because I watched those episodes – but then to put myself in the place of one of the characters on the ship during the assault... It made it so visceral and real for me to connect to, and have images and thoughts about, that I could easily go back into and visualise what Shaw was going through when he was a man in his twenties working in the engine room during the attack. So it was such a fun experiment, such a fun acting opportunity."

It's one of many moments that adds to the cinematic scope of season three, which has been receiving an overwhelmingly positive response from fans. "Without being too precious, you could tell something special was happening," Stashwick suggests. "You could feel that we were part of something big. This is to *TNG* what *The Wrath Of Khan* was to *The Original Series*, in that level of heart and warmth and jeopardy and action and pathos and thoughtfulness and character."

"Then cinematography, how they lit the scenes... it just felt like classic. That wonderful '80s rich filmmaking, things landing with authority and crafted shots. You could tell we were connected to something bigger. I'm almost at a loss for words, which is rare for me."

He's quick to add that this could all be his point of view, simply because it was a

"rare, wonderful opportunity" to work with the cast – and not only those that he's been a fan of for years, but those he has personally known and loved as long.

"One of my science officers [T'veen] on the bridge, Stephanie [Czajkowski], was in my improv school. I've known her forever, so it was such a special thing. I'm only speaking for myself, but I really felt like I was part of something big."

### CAPTAIN'S ORDERS

As a fan, it seems he's still pinching himself. "Little Midwest Todd Stashwick somehow is sitting in the captain's chair on the bridge of the Titan," he grins. "It was never lost on me."

"I had to kind of bifurcate during the job, where part of me was the adult, professional actor man, doing his job and serving the scene in the story and the characters and connecting with my partners, and serving the moment. The other part of me was like, 'Holy expletive deleted, this is so incredibly fun!'"

Picking a favourite moment from production proves hard for Stashwick. "I certainly loved shooting that scene on the holodeck. Because, again, especially in television, you're rarely given the amount of real estate permission and trust with such wonderfully written material. So that day was a highlight."

"Frakes was directing and he just kept giving me permission. Patrick just giving me..." he trails off. "You know what, I get a little choked up. When you think about a show that's called *Picard*, and then my character basically drives this whole scene and then Patrick's character has to sit and take it. And then after that scene to have him walk up to me and put his hand on my arm and go, 'So expletive deleted good'. That was really special."

"But then again, the 12-year-old in me getting to run down a hallway and shoot phasers and get into fights," he laughs loudly, "that's pretty great. To say things like 'Evasive manoeuvres', 'Battle stations', 'Red alert', all that stuff. All the captain stuff was super great. A thousand little moments were the highlights for me."

He notes that he'd already "checked that bucket list box" for appearing in *Star Trek* with a 2004 role as a Vulcan who, it turned out, was actually a Romulan.

"If we wind it back, I thought my *Star Trek* journey was over when I played Talok on *Enterprise*. I thought that was special, right? So this, this exceeded anything... To be at the captain's table, man. It's an honour and I feel a responsibility as a custodian to it."

"I would love to see *miraculous* things happen for Captain Shaw," he laughs. "Anything could happen! Here's the reality: if I never get to play Shaw again, I am absolutely cool with that. Because wow, I got a chance to do it like this and this was *stellar*." ●

“Without being too precious, you could tell something special was happening”



STAR TREK: PICARD  
ED SPELEERS

# *FUTURE'S PAST*



## THE FINAL SEASON OF STAR TREK: PICARD INTRODUCED NEW CHARACTERS – AND POSSIBLY NONE MORE SURPRISING THAN ED SPELEERS'S JACK CRUSHER

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

**P**LAYING THE SON OF *STAR TREK* royalty could've gone an entirely different way for Ed Speleers. In fact, he could've ended up playing another game-changing role altogether.

"Initially I was actually asked to go up for a different part in a different *Trek* series. I think it was *Strange New Worlds*," he recalls, when looking back at his journey to playing Jack Crusher. "I did a tape and nothing came of it. I was a bit disgruntled, if I remember correctly!"

As he was only given certain excerpts of dialogue – known as "sides" – he can't swear to the role he first auditioned for. But he thinks he might know...

"This would be completely hazarding a guess," he stipulates. "I'm assuming based on what I've seen of *Strange New Worlds* that it's the Kirk character that Paul Wesley played. Maybe I'm backing myself far too much there. But I feel that that's right, judging by the sides that I had at the time. That sounds very conceited of me, doesn't it? 'I thought I must have been going up for Kirk, it has to be!'" he howls with laughter.

### **SPELEERS ALERT**

Though that wasn't to be, it was because greater things lay only a few weeks away. "It was pretty clear that it was something to do with *Picard* just because of some of the names being bandied around in the email, and I felt I was right for the role."

However, he recalls "almost being in tears because I couldn't quite find my way in with the part" when doing the self-tape audition. "I was just incredibly frustrated. I nearly gave up. I think I had a big, melodramatic hissy fit moment where I was like, right, that's it, I'm giving up acting and giving up all of it!"

Fortunately, after being persuaded to do one more take, it quickly escalated into a screen test, an offer and a relocation to California for seven months. Spoiler alert if you've not watched the first two episodes – and if so, why not? – Jack Crusher is the son of Beverly Crusher and Jean-Luc Picard. But Picard wasn't aware he even existed...

In order to get Speleers up to speed, showrunner Terry Matalas gave him some homework. "*Star Trek University*" is how →



the email was labelled,” Speleers chuckles. “It was an extensive list of *Star Trek* episodes all the way up from *TNG*, then films going all the way back to *The Wrath Of Khan* all the way through to *First Contact*. They obviously left out *Nemesis*: ‘Don’t look at that,’” he jokes.

British-born, Speleers recalls his father being into *The Original Series*, then later watching *The Next Generation* on BBC Two when he got home from school.

“I can’t say I’m a *Star Trek* aficionado, but I feel now, having been put through my paces by Terry and everybody else – and also just being embraced by that cast and crew – I’m hook, line and sinker a fully fledged member of the *Star Trek* fandom.

“This whole thing has become so close to my heart, for a number of reasons not just about the world that I’ve got to be a part of – there were circumstances surrounding it that for me and my family made this such an important job. But also such a wonderful opportunity.”

Speaking of family, there’s a certain Mr Wil Wheaton very much still in the picture, having appeared as (now) half-brother Wesley Crusher in season two of *Picard*, as well as regularly presenting *The Ready Room*.

“I only [first] met him by chance, actually,” Speleers recalls, “when I was being shown a particular set. He was showing some people around, we met, and then we had a whole big, real bromance moment. He’s, obviously, a lovely, lovely, lovely human who is so entrenched in *Star Trek* and actually loves it to his core. But I haven’t had the chance to do anything with him yet acting-wise.”

## FAMILY TIES

Wheaton wasn’t the only one to greet Speleers with open arms, as he soon discovered when joining such a well-established team.

“Very quickly I understood that I was working with people that wanted to welcome me into their world,” he smiles. “You’re trying your best to reach the same goal, and if I was only nervous and only worried about all that, I think I’d have really suffered and struggled.

“Of course you have these moments. I can’t believe I’m actually stood on a ship, the Titan, and I’m looking at Riker one side of me, and the other side of me is Picard, who I just had an argument with. I’m having father and son barneys with Patrick Stewart.

“I mean, that’s quite a full-on thing to be thinking about contemplating. Then I’m having these great scenes with Jeri Ryan as Seven of Nine. I felt completely spoiled, because I was getting to play with all of them, all the time – both the new cast and the old cast. It’s a huge honour to have been given the opportunity to work with these people.”

He says it’s the relationships at the core of *Trek* that really struck a chord with him. “Those scenes I got to play out with Patrick were incredibly emotive and memorable for

Speleers as Jack Crusher: definite daddy issues.

Patrick Stewart and Gates McFadden.

“Mom, I can’t go to bridge today, I feel sick.”

me, because it’s what acting is all about. You can do all the fun stuff surrounding it, which I love doing. But it was getting into understanding what’s making these two tick.

“With Picard, he’s obviously finding himself on the back foot. He almost has to sit and listen to Jack’s anger because that’s been bubbling up for so long. There’s hurt and confusion on Picard’s side as well, because he’s trying to work out why. I don’t think he’s got a choice but to listen to Jack’s temper.”

The scale of this season is, by now, no surprise to anyone – and it definitely stood out to Speleers when they were filming.

“Terry made it very clear he wanted this to be a movie, he wanted this to be the send-off that *Next Gen* never had, and the film that they never made,” he explains.

“As a result, I felt it. I felt it day one when I stepped onto the Titan, onto the bridge. I was blown away by the scale in terms of the size of the [production] crew. Again, the intricacies of

what that crew were doing as well, everything from all these screens, visuals working a certain way and having one particular department in charge of that.

“There are certain sets throughout the season that just completely blew my mind. The level of detail of the costumes as well. Michael Crow [costume designer] just knocked this out of the park.”

It seems like certain props were so beloved by the actor that they found a new home...

“The phaser that Jack has got is pretty cool. I shouldn’t say this, but I’m going to: to be able to walk away with one – or maybe one went missing at some point – that’s pretty cool.” That’s being stored with his combadge and he assures us no one’s ever getting near them.

It is, we suggest, only the beginning of a life-long association with *Trek*. But the full impact of that has yet to hit him. “I don’t know if I’ve had that moment,” he considers. “What I have had, which is probably the pessimist in





"Hmm, he does seem to have a temperature."

"I would play him quite happily for the next 10, 15 years, given the opportunity"

me, is if I never work again, I can hold my head high knowing I was in *Star Trek* and I got to play a really prominent role. Face to face with Patrick Stewart and the *TNG* cast – no one can ever take that away from me, no matter what happens. But I don't know if I felt the full throttle impact just yet. And I don't know what that really is."

With so many positive memories, it's difficult to narrow down the best part of his *Picard* experience to one stand-out moment.

"That's so hard! I don't think you realise how much this whole thing meant to me. I get quite emotional talking about it. Every day when I was driving myself out to Santa Clarita to shoot it, I was just excited.

"There was always nerves in there because I had so much to do. I felt pressure because you're coming into this hugely revered world and I feel like I was given a golden opportunity – I didn't want to let anybody down, least of all myself. In terms of best moments, I was really,



Mum and dad: now's not the time for arguing..."

really, really spoiled. He's the sort of character that I've been craving to play for so long because he's got so much complexity to him. He's so well-nuanced that he gets the chance to do a bit of everything.

"I genuinely loved it from start to finish and I'm missing playing him so much at the moment, I really am."

Which prompts the inevitable question, of course: would he like to see Jack return?

"I would play him quite happily for the next 10, 15 years, given the opportunity. Terry has told me he's got a plan. He sort of told me that he felt that this was Jack's origin story, in a way. I think there's a lot more to be told.

"There's a lot more to be told for characters across the board in this season, both the new ones and the original *TNG* cast. But it's just about if we get given the chance to do so." ●

*Star Trek: Picard* is on Paramount+ in the UK and US, plus Prime Video in the UK.







# FUTURE VISIONS

STAR WARS' MOST AUDACIOUS ANIMATED SERIES **VISIONS** RETURNS - AND THIS TIME, AARDMAN, CARTOON SALOON AND MORE ARE INVOLVED

WORDS: JACK SHEPHERD



**STAR WARS: VISIONS** STARTED as an experiment: a series of nine animated anthology short stories set in a galaxy far, far away, but with no relation to the main Skywalker Saga. When they were released on Disney+, the reception was rapturous; thunderous applause followed. And that's when executive producer James Waugh – who also oversees the “Franchise Story” team at Lucasfilm – started asking: how far can *Visions* push *Star Wars* storytelling?

“We always saw *Visions* as a framework and a platform to tell unique *Star Wars* stories with really interesting creators,” Waugh tells *SFX*. The first season, he explains, was mainly anime because the team at Lucasfilm loved the artform. Therefore, the emphasis was on animation studios from Japan telling uniquely Japanese stories informed by their culture. “That unlocked for us the reality that different cultural perspectives on *Star Wars* could really influence what these stories could potentially be,” he adds.

## GLOBAL VISIONS

*Visions* now returns with nine more short stories, but this time the outlook is global. Studios from Spain (El Guiri), Chile (Punkrobot), South Korea (Studio Mir), South Africa (Triggerfish), France (Studio La Cacherie), India (88 Pictures) and once again Japan (D'Art Shtajio) have produced episodes. Closer to *SFX*'s home, Ireland's Cartoon Saloon has made a short titled “Screecher's Reach”, as has the UK's most famous animators, Aardman, with a short titled “I Am Your Mother”.

For Waugh, having these different perspectives from different cultures makes the new season increasingly diverse. “You look at Cartoon Saloon – the short is steeped in Irish culture, and you wouldn't get that otherwise,” he says. “Each culture brought their own unique take on *Star Wars*... you're seeing the culture reflected through *Star Wars*.”

He points to “The Bandits Of Golak”, from 88 Pictures, as an example of deeply fusing a cultural perspective into a story. “I remember when they first pitched us the idea, they showed us this amazing, dazzling art and photos of dhabas, which are truck stops throughout India.

“They decorate them in bright, vibrant colours to attract travellers, and so that was the reference point. Then it became, how do we build this within *Star Wars*? How do we take this thing that is innate to a culture and put it within the *Star Wars* setting?”

Another effect of opening up *Visions* to storytellers from around the world was the variety of changing animation styles. “There are animation styles that you normally don't associate with what we've done,” Waugh

Punkrobot's short “In The Stars”.

“The metaphor of the galaxy is powerful and needed, but it is really a human story”

explains. “Punkrobot has this amazing fusion of 3D meets stop-motion that allows for rich texture. Triggerfish's short, the design of those characters are completely unique. The characters have this doll-like texture.”

Many animation studios had seen what the first season had accomplished – filmmakers telling stories about roaming Jedi knights, rogue Sith on the Outer Rim, relatives of Jabba the Hutt starting a rock band – and wanted to play around in that *Star Wars* sandbox. However, while Lucasfilm received phone calls from various suitors hoping to get involved, the process of recruiting studios did not change from the first season.

“The first volume did have a resonance in the animation community,” Waugh says. “We certainly had studios that were really inspired and wanted to reach out. But it was more about which studios we were really impressed by. The truth is, we're just huge animation fans. Seeing Cartoon Saloon's work, Triggerfish, Punkrobot – all of these studios are amazing, and so we reached out to them.

“We really wanted to make sure that we had an interesting mix of globally different perspectives and different lenses. We did some

cold calling. Some people were just shocked that *Star Wars* was calling them, but it came from passion and love.”

Lucasfilm soon started getting pitches and Waugh started feeling out the types of stories the studios wanted to tell within the *Star Wars* framework. “We're always looking for, where's the heart and where's the soul of the storytelling?” he says.

“We were surprised by how each of the studios had that anchor. We didn't get the types of pitches that we often can get at *Star Wars*, dealing with the mega mythos of the galaxy and all the world-building elements. They understood that we were looking for emotional, true stories.”

He offers an example in Aardman, the stop-motion studio behind Wallace and Gromit, Shaun the Sheep and *Chicken Run*. “Aardman is such a storied studio and we were expecting more comedy pitches, but what we really respected and admired about them is that they had something to say, and so their pitch is so relatable and universal, even from a studio that we traditionally think of as more bombastic and comedy-oriented. It's funnier because it had that truth to it.”

“The Bandits Of Golak” by 88 Pictures.





Studio Mir,  
"Journey To The  
Dark Head."



"Aau's Song"  
from  
Triggerfish.



"I Am Your  
Mother" from  
Aardman.



With such diversity on display, a fundamental question that Lucasfilm has long contended with arose: what makes a *Star Wars* story? Sure, Jedi and Sith and Midi-chlorians are all uniquely *Star Wars*, but they do not necessarily make a bona fide *Star Wars* story – and *Star Wars* stories don't have to include them. Since the shorts within *Visions* can be about almost anything, there needed to be a guiding light that brought them all together.

"What was interesting this time around was delicately balancing; staying true to the heart of good *Star Wars* storytelling, the values and the type of themes we usually resonate with, while also opening the door to what *Star Wars* stories could be, and finding ways to use *Visions* as a place to push the boundaries of what we're comfortable with," Waugh says.

"Animation gives us a little bit of a natural leeway for that. It's a way of looking at *Star Wars* like we never had before. Seeing Aardman's very, very British humour, it really played well. But all of the studios had that awkward moment of, does this fit in *Star Wars*? And then also, is it doing something unexpected?"

For Waugh, the value and theme that's core to all the stories is simply being relatable on a human level. "You look at *Episode VII* and Rey and that's really a story about a lonely girl who discovers a dog, BB-8. You could look at it in those terms. She suddenly has a friend.

"The metaphor of the galaxy is ultimately powerful and needed, but it is really a human story, and so our goal is to keep that guiding light with the studios."

Of course, filmmakers also have a desire to use all the *Star Wars* tools at their disposal, and the first season of *Visions* featured a fair number of lightsabers. The second season is no different, with storytellers gravitating towards using the Force.

"The Force really fits with this idea of following your own inner voice," Waugh says. "It plays with themes that are so inherent about embracing your destiny, and that's one of the elements that really defines *Star Wars* storytelling. Naturally, a lot of the studios gravitated towards wanting to have some sort of Force element within their storytelling.

"And it expresses itself in different ways. Like with Triggerfish, the Force is expressed with a song, which is really beautiful and unique and something we haven't seen before. But it's that same metaphor of finding your inner calling, just with a Force ability that manifests through song.

"There are also characters that are Force-sensitive on the run, and a character looking for a better life and being tempted by something that's ultimately Dark Side-related," he continues. "And there are a couple of clear Jedi stories. Because, you know, lightsabers and Jedi make everybody happy."

While Waugh wants to stress that *Visions* does not fit within canon, one short from the first season featured Boba Fett, with Temuera Morrison reprising the role. "Some of the stories could easily fit within a canonical perspective," he says, "and if you think that story takes place within your head canon, great! Even then, we weren't looking for

expanded tales about known characters. What's interesting about *Visions* is the opportunity to use the texture and richness of the galaxy to create new stories and new characters that are very clearly influenced by the elements of a galaxy."

However, he tantalisingly adds without going into specifics that we can expect a familiar face in season two: "I will say Aardman has a very special guest star, a known character from *Star Wars*, and there are tons of Easter eggs throughout that are instantly recognisable, and characters we've known throughout the trilogies and the shows."

## EXPANDED UNIVERSE

With the first season unanimously praised, you have to wonder whether this novel approach to *Star Wars* storytelling has had a wider impact on Lucasfilm – and Waugh is well placed to speak about the franchise's future.

"I don't know if *Visions* in particular has influenced the decision-making across Lucasfilm," he says. "But what's beautiful about *Star Wars* is that it's a galaxy, it's a place, it's a history and a timeline. There's so much potential and only so many stories that the camera has been placed on.

"We all feel that there's a real expandable reality to *Star Wars* storytelling. There's never been this sort of a phenomenon, where the elements, the sounds, it means so much. I am of the mindset that there is room for all layers of *Star Wars* storytelling." ●

*Star Wars: Visions* is on Disney+ from 4 May.



STAR WARS:  
YOUNG JEDI ADVENTURES

# DOING <sup>IT</sup> FOR THE KIDS

YOUNGLINGS FINALLY HAVE A FLASHY STAR WARS SHOW OF  
THEIR OWN WITH **YOUNG JEDI ADVENTURES**

WORDS: JEFF SPRY







**E**VER WONDERED WHY it's taken so long for Lucasfilm to deliver a *Star Wars* show targeting the under fives? It's a salient question, which content chief James Waugh addresses ahead of the

launch of *Star Wars: Young Jedi Adventures*.

"For a long time we just weren't sure if there was an appropriate preschool translation for *Star Wars*," he explains. "But as a father, what was important was that first moment where I'd pass on what I'd learned and show my son this incredibly imaginative space that really set my mind on fire when I was a kid. The more we interacted with fans, it seemed that was not a rare story. Dads and moms wanted to introduce their kids to the galaxy sooner and share that magic."

The new series is specifically aimed at preschoolers, giving them their first encounter with the *Star Wars* universe. They'll see Jedi younglings learning the ways of the Force at a temple outpost on Tenoo during the High Republic era, 200 years before the Skywalker Saga. "Finding a way to do that with a preschool form was always the challenge," says Waugh, "but we felt like it was worth exploring."

#### ONCE UPON A TIME...

Like legions of us enamoured of the galaxy far, far away, writer Michael Olson grew up with *Star Wars* as a definitive element in his life. Part of the reason he became a filmmaker was a childhood memory of his dad's home-taped video of *The Empire Strikes Back*.

"Before I could watch the movie, he put on a short film he made when he was in high school," Olson recalls. "So the notion of filmmaking and *Star Wars* are linked and I had the bug very early on. I've been working in children's television for almost 20 years. My first thought coming into preschool TV was, 'Why isn't there a *Star Wars* show for kids?'"

"When my daughter Rose was about five and it was time to welcome her into the larger world of *Star Wars*, I sat down with her to watch the movies and it was a wonderful moment. We had a blast but I had to pause it every 15 seconds to explain what was going on. It reignited that passion I had of wishing there was something I could sit and watch with her, that she would enjoy as much as I would."

Waugh was intent on great *Star Wars* stories, no matter where the influences came from. "We're adamant that they have to feel like authentic *Star Wars* stories and be deeply rooted in the spirit of *Star Wars*," he explains. "We try our best not to be in a restrictive space and instead work with incredible creators like Michael and find a way to help them craft the best version of what's in their heads." →



Waugh and Olson both admit to loving *Muppet Babies*, but *Young Jedi Adventures* isn't exactly like that old Saturday morning cartoon. They believe the similarity there is that the show captured the spirit of Jim Henson's original intent, then disseminated it in a way that was appealing.

"In the same way that *Muppet Babies* ignited a new generation of Muppets fans, what we're hoping for is that our show does the same thing with soon-to-be *Star Wars* fans," Olson says. "I find it exhilarating writing for a younger audience, because they'll let you know if something is resonating with them or not.

"Characters need to be appealing and fun, but we as parents want the series to also be additive and bring some sort of lesson or moral into the content. *Star Wars* is about creating shows or movies that inspire kids to seek positive values like friendship, compassion and selflessness.

"This is not younglings in a nursery. This is younglings off on wild galactic adventures. If there was any challenge, it's that we have to focus on making sure our stories are clear and that kids are connecting to our characters. There's no shorthand for us."

#### PURE IMAGINATION

Creating the design aesthetic for this brightly hued world was a collaborative process that unified the imaginations of many artists in order to find the proper look.

"What unlocked so much of this and allowed us to lean into that Jedi youngling/Padawan fantasy is a publishing series we launched in 2019 called *The High Republic*," says Waugh. "The point of that new era was a hopeful time, back when the Jedi were the guardians of peace and justice in the galaxy.

"So younglings were not wrought with the burden of a Jedi Order towards the end of its lifecycle and about to be in a massive civil war. The worldbuilding framework of the timeline allowed for bright expressions that would inform the storytelling."

Joey Chou is an artist that the whole crew admired for his superb graphical sense. He's an illustrator who's done lots of Disney work, but he's also published his own art books. They loved his shape language and bright storybook colours, so they began using examples of his work internally.

"I love the graphical 2D look that so many cartoons have, but it felt like we were doing something that was supposed to be teeing kids up for *Star Wars*," Olson says. "I wanted it to be in three dimensions. I wanted us to feel when the kids hop on a speeder bike and they go zooming through the forest.

"The challenge was to translate the 2D designs and those colourful looks into something that's going to work for CG. We have an incredible team working on this show,

as well as Icon, the animation company in Canada. They've poured their heart and soul into the series and found this magic to make it extra colourful."

The original *Star Wars* was effective partly due to the freshness of its grungy universe. Well-worn droids had scuff marks and there were scratches, dents and dings everywhere.

"Those vehicles, buildings and droids felt like they really existed and had the bumps to show it," says Waugh. "Even in a kids' show, these ships and starfighters look so great. They have that lived-in quality that required a lot of thought and care, made by people who love *Star Wars*."

One of the greatest joys of working on a *Star Wars* endeavour must be creating a new monster or spaceship or world that then becomes part of the canon. *Young Jedi Adventures*' Jedi outpost on the Outer Rim planet of Tenoo is one such destination, which has an interesting legacy connection. "It's actually based on a Ralph McQuarrie drawing

that has these giant blood orange trees where people are living on top of the trees," Olson notes. "So we took that as our inspiration and built a whole world around that, and it unlocked narrative opportunities. There's all these wonderful questions we get to ask ourselves and then have the fun of colouring it in. It's a really expansive world, and there's a lot more secrets that I can't wait to share with other people."

Waugh explains that these remote temples are something that was initially rooted in *The High Republic*. "Part of the goal is that younglings and Jedi are going to these frontier parts of the galaxy as the hyperspace lanes are connected, to meet new people and connect to new cultures," he says. "That felt like such a beautiful metaphor for early grade school and preschool kids stepping out into the world for the first time and seeing all its wonders."

The precocious blue-furred alien in the show, named Nubs, could well become the next Baby Yoda. Olson's idea was to conjure up

"This is not younglings in a nursery. This is younglings off on wild galactic adventures"

The gang practise with friendly droid RJ-83.





Nubs is voiced by *The Clone Wars*' Dee Bradley Baker.

Lys Solay, Kai Brightstar and Nubs get all sabery.



a friendly but fierce character that kids would connect with. "Prior to this I was working on a preschool show called *Puppy Dog Pals* about two puppy brothers," he says. "I felt like this show needed some kind of energy that honoured *Star Wars* but also expressed the emotions that the younger end of our audience might be experiencing.

"Nubs is a very expressive Pooba that speaks his own language. I have two young boys, and they love him and giggle whenever he comes on screen."

*Star Wars* is famous for its roster of robots like R2-D2, C-3PO, BB-8, K-2SO and IG-11. *Young Jedi Adventures*' own droid star, destined to join this elite group of smart machines, is RJ-83.

"I cannot wait for people to meet RJ," Olson says. "Behind the scenes he's definitely inspired by BD-1 from *Jedi: Fallen Order*. It was a testament to the show's art team, finding the look that felt like its own unique thing but also very much harkens to R2-D2.

"He's this spunky little co-pilot to a character called Nash – the Jedi's non-Jedi friend, and she's the one who takes them around the galaxy. He's super-cute and a heartfelt companion to the whole gang on our show. He also turns into an adorable backpack that hops onto Nash's back and starts beeping."

## A HAPPY ENDING

For both Waugh and Olson, creating *Young Jedi Adventures* was a deeply gratifying experience. "One of the most surreal and exciting experiences for me was having Dee Bradley Baker come in and voice the character of Nubs for the first time," Olson recalls. "To hear that character come alive, a character that had been living in my head for a year and a half, and hear him embrace that character, was such a fulfilling moment and is something I'll never forget."

Waugh reflects on his role bringing this special series to fruition by acknowledging his love for all the creative collaborations he ended up making.

"This is one of those projects that comes from a place of passion," he says. "With each creative layer that came on the show, each story session, it felt like there was a kismet there and an energy. When you saw these disparate departments, these ideas coming together in a way only animation does, it was that moment of elation where I thought, 'This is going to be really good.'"

*Star Wars: Young Jedi Adventures* is on Disney Junior and Disney+ from 4 May.



**FEAR THE  
WALKING DEAD**  
BEGINS ITS VERY  
LAST SEASON  
PROMISING  
FAMILIAR FACES,  
SURPRISES AND,  
ULTIMATELY,  
CLOSURE

WORDS: TARA BENNETT





FEAR THE WALKING DEAD

# FEAR FACTOR



**L**AST YEAR *THE WALKING DEAD* lumbered off into the record books, ending 11 seasons of storytelling as television's most honoured horror franchise. But coming up from behind is its cousin in undead scares and post-apocalyptic woes, *Fear The Walking Dead*.

The first spin-off series of the franchise, *Fear* was devised by original *Dead* creator Robert Kirkman with Dave Erickson, and approached the same world-ending event through the eyes of the complicated Clark/Manawa blended family and the Salazar family of Los Angeles.

Across eight seasons, the series has changed considerably, taking a more nomadic approach to its storytelling, with an ever-evolving cast. Alicia Clark (Alycia Debnam-Carey), Daniel Salazar (Rubén Blades) and Victor Strand (Colman Domingo) are the only original characters to have made it to the final season.

Under the guidance of long-time showrunners Andrew Chambliss and Ian Goldberg, *Fear* is now embarking upon its victory lap season, bringing its long journey to a close with 12 episodes and plenty of full-circle moments, including the return of Clark family matriarch Madison (Kim Dixon).

Now her ultimate fate, along with those of Alicia, Daniel, Strand and Morgan Jones (Lennie James) will be revealed, as the ensemble of characters audiences have come to love, or hate, get their dues.

### HAIL PADRE

Acknowledging the bittersweet scenario of getting a final season order, Chambliss tells *SFX* that it's been daunting to tie up loose ends, but fulfilling to do so on their own creative terms. "We knew the number of episodes that we had to play with, so it really allowed us to tailor the story to fit those episodes," he says.

"And it really just all came together where the amount of story we had to fit into these two blocks of six episodes worked out really nicely in the way we were able to build the story.

"It allowed us to tell a very forward-looking story, while also having all these characters really take stock of where their journeys began, where they've been, who they've become and where they're going to land once the series ends."

As the shepherds of the *Fear* story since season four, they've worked closely with Scott Gimple, the CCO for *The*



Jenna Elfman plays June, aka Naomi and Laura.

*Walking Dead* franchise, to chart the seasonal arcs. Goldberg says they did the same for season eight, without restrictions. "There were never any directives to hold certain things for spin-offs or anything like that," Goldberg confirms. "We had the freedom to tell the story we wanted to tell."

The season picks up from where the season seven finale left things, with Madison and Morgan blindfolded on a boat headed to the mysterious PADRE community, hoping to find his missing daughter, Mo. The supposed safe zone has been teased for some time in the series, but it was only when Madison's story about her job collecting children for the community was revealed that red flags officially unfurled.

Goldberg confirms that the pair should be very wary. "Everything about the way society is run at PADRE is designed to beat out that human connection between people – to separate parents from their children, to raise children in a way that they're not emotionally connected," he explains.

In every series of the franchise, arcs have explored the new model societies



Rubén Blades as Daniel Salazar: "Um, hello?"

Wren (Mandy Sullivan): "Oh gawd, not you..."





Austin Amelio and Christine Evangelista: peekaboo!

You don't want to mess with June, you know.



“There were never any directives to hold certain things for spin-offs”

that have arisen out of the remnants of humanity. Goldberg says PADRE will be one more to ponder. “This is a question that I think all *The Walking Dead* shows wrestle with – and we’ve certainly wrestled with it on ours – which is pragmatism versus believing in something more.

“Maybe they’re surviving a little better at PADRE than people outside of it. But at the end of the day, what are they surviving for if they’ve lost that human connection, and family? It’s not necessarily an easy answer, because I think there’s arguments to be made on both sides. So we’ll see how it goes with PADRE in season eight.”

When it comes to Madison, Goldberg says that getting Kim Dixon to return has been their goal for quite some time, and it’s just been a matter of timing and the right story.

“At the end of season seven, we really felt like we had the right story to tell,” he says. “First and foremost, this had to be a side of Madison Clark we’ve never seen before; this is a reinvention. To see her in this completely different situation, where she’s actually ripping families apart, is →





Tripadvisor says: "Pretty, but too many dead folk."

**“The things that you leave behind can, many times, be something that outlives you”**

something that we really leaned into. Why would Madison be doing something that's so contrary to the Madison that we found before?

"Madison is left at this really dark night of the soul," Goldberg continues. "She's done a lot of things that she now regrets working for PADRE." But in crossing paths with Morgan, there's a path to redemption.

"It's something that we're going to see her really wrestle with in season eight; the Madison that she was in season four and the Madison she became in the interim. It's not going to be an easy road for her to walk in season eight. It's very much about her identity, who she is, what she believes in."

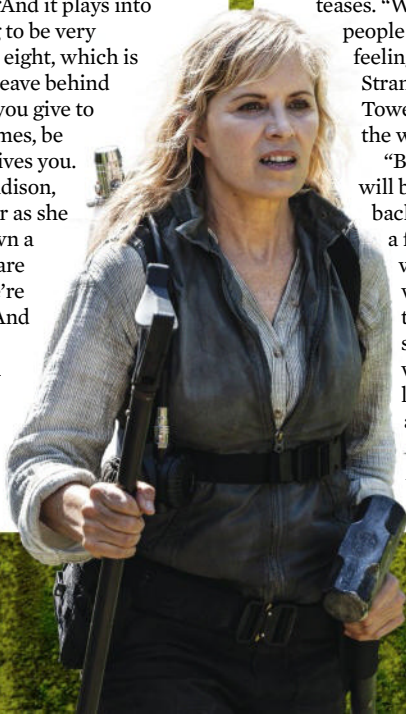
Chambliss adds, "And it plays into a theme that's going to be very important in season eight, which is the things that you leave behind and the legacy that you give to people can, many times, be something that outlives you. Or in the case of Madison, it lived alongside her as she was descending down a darker path. Those are some things that we're going to play with. And it's what we really wanted to land with Alicia's last moments in ["Amina"] when she walked back to the wasteland."

When the audience last saw Alicia, she was seemingly healed, with a new purpose in helping people get to PADRE. It was presented in a hazy and dreamlike way, which the showrunners say was all for a purpose.

"We've seen people say, 'Wait, does that mean she died and that's her afterlife, getting to be a hero?' Or, 'Did she overcome this infection that she had?'" Asked if we will get an answer, Chambliss says only, "For me and Ian, we always take the optimistic view towards things. As viewers, we would lean towards the latter."

As for the rest of the ensemble cast, the pair say audiences should be ready for some big moments. "The way that the story wanted to lay out really did feel like it had its own gravity that started to pull the characters back together," Chambliss teases. "When we left season seven, people had a lot of pretty strong feelings — particularly about Strand and what he did with his Tower — that are going to get in the way of things in the present. "But the course of the story will bring all those characters back together, and maybe even a few other familiar faces. We wanted to, as best we could with the real estate we have, try to give everyone a really satisfying conclusion. We wanted to try to make it feel like we weren't leaving anyone out in the cold." ●

*Fear The Walking Dead is on AMC from 14 May.*



# A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

**Actor Lennie James reflects on giving Morgan Jones his swan song**

**From the pilot of *The Walking Dead* through to *Fear*, you've played Morgan in over 90 episodes. Coming into this final season, did you allow that to really register?**

In all honesty, my mission was to not do that. It was not to spend too much time looking behind me. But having said that, there are points in the process and in the story where it's just been unavoidable. There are people showing up from way back. There are plot points in the story that force Morgan to look at his journey and look at his life. So my mission then — a bit like the journey of Morgan, really — has kind of evolved and changed. If it was relevant to Morgan, it was allowed. If it was about me, it just wasn't allowed because I don't exist in this universe.

**You and Kim Dixon are OGs in the world of *The Walking Dead*. How was it finally getting to have her as a scene partner?**

It was certainly on my bucket list. When the possibility of coming over



Is Morgan (Lennie James) going to make it?



to *Fear* was first raised, it was that I would get to work with Kim. I didn't get to work with her before she left. And I do not have the words to express how happy I am that we did get to work together this time around. Their journey together in the final episodes is kind of epic. It's everything that I said I've wanted for Morgan. We kind of got a double banger, because he got it for himself, but he also got it in his relationship with Madison.

**Morgan has been through many disparate chapters. Do you feel like he's finally reconciled with himself in this last arc?**

Well, this is the *Walking Dead* universe. There is no life without struggle in this world that we've created. There is no happiness without pain. This final season, for me, was, "What does Morgan live for, or what does Morgan die for?" I think that is the mission for season eight.

If he achieves what he set out to do – which was to take care of the people that he cared about most – where does that leave him? Does that leave him walking away? Or does that leave him in a puddle of blood on the floor, possibly about to turn? I think they're unavoidable questions and unavoidable possibilities for this man. In season eight, we address those questions head on. And that's what I wanted for Morgan. I wanted his finale to be an answer to those questions.

**Morgan is not part of any of the spin-off shows, so how does it feel closing this career chapter?**

If you would have said to me at that point when [Morgan's son] Duane hits Rick [in *The Walking Dead's* first episode] that this is what's going to happen, I certainly wouldn't have believed you. To be at this point now with Morgan, I couldn't have hoped for it. I couldn't have wished for it. I couldn't have imagined that it would have happened.

I'm happy with the job done. I'm excited about moving on, but I will miss him. I will miss the people that I've been working with immensely. I will miss the routine and I will miss the day to day. And either in November or April of each year, there will be a moment where I'll think, "There's something I'm supposed to be doing..."



FROM

# FRESH

A BUS ARRIVES IN THE TOWN NOBODY CAN LEAVE, BRINGING SECRETS  
AND TURMOIL IN THE SECOND SEASON OF FROM

WORDS: TARA BENNETT





# MEAT

**I**F YOU LIKE YOUR HORROR WITH A HEALTHY side dish of paranoia and psychological intrigue, *From* is the show you might have missed. John Griffin's series centres on a Middle-American small town that's seemingly been beckoning people into it, then not allowing anyone to leave, since the 1800s.

As if that wasn't panic-inducing enough, once nightfall cloaks the town, shape-shifting nocturnal creatures come out of the woods to brutally murder anyone naive enough to be outside, or to let them inside.

The first season established the basic rules of this cursed place, including the two factions of unwilling residents just trying to exist in this purgatory. Sheriff Boyd Stevens (Harold Perrineau) is the ex-military de facto mayor who rings the curfew bell every night and tries to create some semblance of safety for everyone. Up on the hill, meanwhile, is Colony House, a big Victorian dwelling overseen by Donna (Elizabeth Saunders) – home to those who bristle at rules and prefer a more laid-back approach to their shared hell.

## ROAD TO NOWHERE

Season two picks up literally where the first season finale left off, with Boyd transported into a well, various members of the Matthews family in potential jeopardy and a passenger bus pulling up to the town's diner. Executive producer and co-showrunner Jeff Pinkner tells *SFX* that the writing team planned to pick right up with their various cliffhangers to keep the audience in the thick of the drama.

"We painted everybody into a corner at the end of the season," Pinkner says. "And we knew we were picking up in real time and also delving into the story of the new passengers." Much as the Matthews family experienced in the *From* pilot, the newcomers will now have the townspeople trying to explain to them their incomprehensible predicament – and the imminent dangers to their safety – without sounding totally nuts.

"Those people need to be educated, but we can take a much more shorthand approach to it," Pinkner says of how the first episode welcomes them into the narrative fold. "Because the audience is ahead of the people on the bus."

Both a tense character drama and a straight-up monster chiller, *From* laid out its horror rules in the pilot and has since featured everything from little kids to beloved elders getting wiped out. No one is safe from the nasties who beckon the unwitting into their claws. For season two, Pinkner says they're continuing to play the scares in a grounded way, while challenging themselves to go still deeper. "From a storytelling perspective, we're starting to explore what's out in the woods a little bit more. We said at the end of the first season that the further you go out in the woods, the more nightmares that reside out there. This year, we're going to experience that more directly."

Pinkner cites films like *Ghost Story*, *Jacob's Ladder* and the paranoid thriller *The Parallax View* as big inspirations for the tone and storytelling methods of this season. "We're trying to incorporate more genre-specific approaches to horror, and using different characters as vehicles to tell both stories from a thematic point of view and from a story point of view, because this town seems to provide a perfect palette for these different kinds of stories," he says.

He adds, "The nightmare creatures out in the woods at night are still very much a presence in our show. We're going to go much further in exploring them this season. But at the same time, the audience is now familiar enough with those characters, and while we want to learn more about them, we'll utilise them in a different way."

## LOST

As for the humans at the centre of it all, Pinkner says that a character who questions if they're being "punished" for trying to escape this place might not be far from the truth. "The more that they've tried to test this place, the more this place seems to be responding in kind," he says. "Survival is one thing. Trying to understand or leave seems to trigger a response in a different way. And that may, or may not, just be our characters' paranoia about the situation."

Case in point: Boyd, who finally decided at the end of season one to get proactive and bring Sara (Avery Konrad) – who seems to be influenced by the entities – into the woods with him to get some answers. "We know Boyd is a man who has been in war-torn situations before, so his first →



# MYSTERY MAN

## Harold Perrineau talks about the craziness to come for Boyd

**You had a whole season of crazy to play as Boyd. Did you start season two asking the writers to fill you in more on what exactly is happening?**

● As an actor, my actual joy and the adventure that I have is going on the journey that my character goes on. The only thing I asked them this year was, "Is there anything I need to know, kind of like [killing] Abby in the first season?" And they said, "Nope, not a thing." From that point on, everything that I had learned in season one went out the window. All the things I thought I knew about Boyd, they were gone, because suddenly Boyd is not even sure about Boyd.

**Boyd is really put in some odd situations coming out of that well. How was it playing the more surreal aspects of what we're going to see?**

● Every step of the way just felt so tentative, and that's how I felt all year. It's not the most fun feeling to live with. But again, it felt like the right thing to do for Boyd. It's one thing feeling like, "I know how to do this. I don't know the actual answers, but I know that I can find the answers." But when you start going like, "I'm not even sure, not only if I'm asking the right questions, but whether I'm the problem or not..." That turns into a whole new ball of wax. So that's season two, pretty much in a nutshell, and it didn't stop. It kept going all season long.

**Who has the most impact on Boyd this season?**

● There certainly are some characters on the bus that challenge Boyd in the way they probably should not challenge him, especially when he's feeling insecure. It's like, "Don't fuck with a caged bear." And I'd say that Kenny and Boyd's relationship is one to really watch. It's a real back-and-forth in power dynamics.

**Of all the characters in the show, which one do you think reflects how you, Harold, would be in this situation?**

● I really sometimes think I would be Donna. Like, "Hey, man, we just gotta have fun while we're here. Don't be an asshole." But I fear that I'd be really reactive like Tabitha. I feel like if I was that scared, it would be hard to control me because I'd be fighting so hard to take care of my family.







Harold Perrineau as Boyd is in trouble.

order of business is always to stabilise the environment. Now that he has stabilised the town, he was able to take a talisman and Sara to venture out into the woods and see if he could discover anything that might help everybody get home.

"It didn't go exactly according to plan," Pinkner chuckles. "This season, Boyd is going to be confronted with the consequences of that journey. Both from a practical standpoint, and also from a psychological standpoint."

## NEW BLOOD

Praising Perrineau's work to date, he enthuses about what's yet to come this year. "Harold is so particularly gifted at portraying gravitas, intelligence and strength under pressure," he says. "We wanted to utilise all of those gifts that he has, and really, really test the character."

The same goes for the Matthews family, who Pinkner says remain the "rooting interest" for the audience. Though we learned of emotional fractures between Jim (Eion Bailey) and Tabitha (Catalina Sandino Moreno) when they arrived in town, the craziness of their circumstances brought them closer together by the end of the season. But Pinkner warns that it won't be that simple.

"One of the themes of our show, which will emerge more and more over time, is the cyclical nature of events," Pinkner says. "How history seems to repeat itself, how patterns repeat, how you can rewrite your own story and how hopefully we learn from events and evolve. The Matthews family are very much a vehicle by which we're going to see whether or not they can evolve."

And that goes for their children, teenager Julie (Hannah Cheramy) and wide-eyed Ethan (Simon Webster) too. "They are both at interesting ages, and they're now growing up in this town," Pinkner says. "For Ethan, this is a



Catalina Sandino Moreno as Tabitha.



Jim (Eion Bailey), still digging his hole.



Have the townspeople spotted the new bus?



Fatima and Ellis: aww, the little lovebirds.



Elizabeth Saunders as the badass Donna.



Mum Tabitha doesn't know about Ethan's visions...

quest and he thinks that he's playing a role and everybody's playing a role. But that's going to be tested. How long can Ethan maintain his innocence? And what will Julie's inevitable maturing look like against this backdrop? And how are Tabitha and Jim going to treat each other, interact with each other, raise their kids and perhaps figure out a way out of this place?"

And what about that busload of new characters just waiting to be introduced? Pinkner says they will add a lot of new energy to the show.

"We absolutely thought about them a little bit from that outside-in point of view, asking, 'What other colours could we use in the show?'"

**“One of the themes of our show, which will emerge more and more over time, is the cyclical nature of events”**

We're definitely utilising the bus passengers to give us some opportunities there. But we started from a place of what would emotionally affect the dynamics of the characters we've already gotten to know in season one and their situation the most."

With a season of reveals to come, Pinkner hopes audiences show up so they can secure more seasons to unfold the whole mythology of this strange place that exists out of time.

He also promises, "It is absolutely our intention that by the time the series ends, both the characters and the audience will have all their questions answered. And as different answers emerge, we want to play the consequences of those answers."

"We want to see how learning things about this place, or having new questions about this place, or having new questions about people's own connections to this place, perhaps, affect them." ●

*From is on MGM+ from 23 April and will be on Sky/NOW soon.*



SILO

THE WOOL  
TRILOGY COMES  
TO SCREENS IN  
SUBTERRANEAN  
SERIES  
SILO

WORDS: **BRYAN CAIRNS**

G O I N G  
U N D

STOCK ART: GETTY



IMAGINE EVERYTHING YOU HOLD true turned out to be one gigantic lie. That's the conundrum that threatens to devour the last 10,000 humans on Earth in upcoming TV series *Silo*.

Based on Hugh Howey's bestselling trilogy of *Wool* novels, the dystopian drama takes place after a global event wipes out most of the population. In the aftermath, a community of survivors settles into a massive bunker that stretches downwards beneath the planet's surface. The structure protects people from the toxic atmosphere... or so they believe. What hooked showrunner Graham Yost (*Justified*, *Speed*), however, wasn't the post-apocalyptic landscape, but the puzzles woven into the narrative.

"What grabbed me about the story is, 'Oh wow. This is a mystery. Who built the silo? When? Why? What's going on?'" Yost tells *SFX*. "Then it's the whole question of, 'Is it deadly outside? What's going on?' →

# BACKGROUND



"And it wasn't people with stuff wrapped around them, going through deserted terrains and having to shoot wolves and fight each other for food," he continues. "For me, it was like, 'They dress like us. They talk like us. They complain about their boss like us. They complain about their husbands and wives like us. They do their jobs. They raise their kids, but they are living in a silo. They don't know when it was built or why.' I like that the dystopian element was not shoved in your face. We say it's like East Germany in 1983; it is a fairly soft dictatorship, at least it seems so. There is that sense that people are watching and something is going on."

*Silo* follows Juliette, portrayed by Rebecca Ferguson, an engineer stationed in the lower levels of the silo. After the death of her lover George, which had been deemed an accident, Juliette begins to suspect foul play and will stop at nothing to expose the truth. But what she discovers may kill her.

"Juliette is someone who grew up in the middle part of the silo," Yost says. "Her father is a doctor. Her mother is a doctor. Something happened in the family. There was a tragedy – her brother died. She sort of ran away from home. She went down to Mechanical, which is the bottom part of the silo. She found a surrogate mother in this woman Walker, who never leaves her workshop. Then she met this girl Shirley and they became best friends. Juliette was apprenticed to Knox, who eventually became head of Mechanical."

## DIGGING DEEP

*Silo's* pressure-cooker situation adds to the fear that people could potentially rush the door to the outside, open it, let the toxic air in and kill everyone in the structure. There's a feeling that has transpired before. That paranoia, along with potentially always being watched and lied to, can and does mess with people's minds.

"There is a sense, at the core, that this is wrong," Yost says. "Human beings weren't meant to live like this. Talking about that with Hugh, we came up with something called 'the syndrome'. It's a neuralgic response to the pressure of living in these conditions."

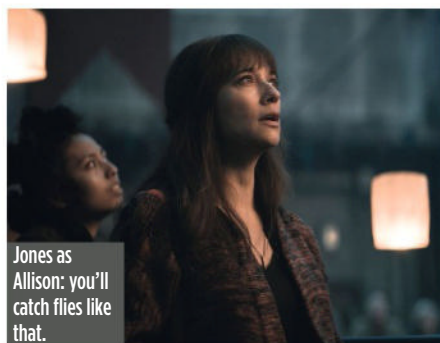
"Is it genetic? Is it this or that? It's something people are ashamed of, and we wanted to play with that. If you have the syndrome, you shouldn't have access to any weapons. You shouldn't have physical activity. We have a character who struggles with that."

The subterranean silo itself consists of 144 levels and spans a mile deep. Some of the wider camera angles help to convey that scope and scale. In addition, Yost and production designer Gavin Bocquet took considerable care in instilling a sense of claustrophobia to the place.

"In the building of our set, we had to have a floor 0," Yost explains. "We have actually said the levels are 30 feet, and that there are



Rashida Jones and David Oyelowo get handsy.



Jones as Allison: 'you'll catch flies like that.'

individual floors with that, but you would talk about the levels. You might be on level 27a, 27b or 27c. We needed a little more scope. We couldn't have the levels 10 feet high. We needed them 30 feet high. That also gave us something closer to the mile.

"We wanted that central shaft with the stairs and the balconies and the bridges to be almost like a cathedral. It's this beautiful big space, but then they can't go outside," he continues. "We always wanted to be playing back and forth with that."

"The production design was critical. I would say the first season, I would be answering 50 questions a day. 'Did they have this in the silo? How did they do this?' Pretty soon everyone got into the silo mentality. If you didn't bring it in, you had to make it."

As is the case with most adaptations, not everything translates from page to screen. Sometimes the source material needs to be whittled down. In other instances, specific ideas or characters require fleshing out. Yost notes that Howey gave the writers a lot of licence when it came to making important changes. "Hugh was on board with all of it," Yost acknowledges. "He was part of the, 'Let's

The rapper Common (Lonnie Rashid Lynn) is Sims.



do this with the character Bernard. Let's do this...' There's a character, Walker, in the [original] story who is male. We gender-flipped it because we wanted Juliette to have a mother figure in her life.

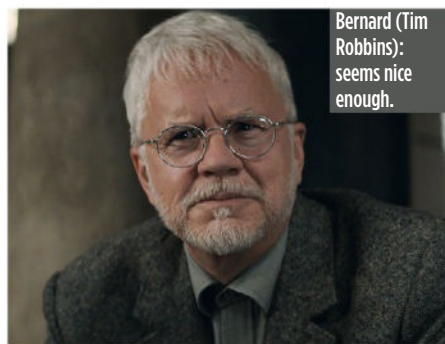
"The other thing that Hugh teased was this small little thing, this one line, about Juliette having had a boyfriend who died under mysterious circumstances. What we decided was to make that the spine of the season. That becomes her goal, to find out what happened to George."

A pivotal detail that remains the same involves the rules forced upon the survivors. The people trust that these regulations exist in order to maintain law, order and safety. The strictest one states that once an individual declares they want to venture outside of the silo, they must do so and clean the external





Rebecca  
Ferguson  
as Juliette:  
mysteries.



Bernard (Tim  
Robbins):  
seems nice  
enough.

sensors. Despite gearing up in protective suits, most people do not make it through the task alive due to the lethal environment outside. And there are other rules – some dubious and some that make sense.

“Why are there just stairs?” Yost poses. “They don’t even know what an elevator is. You have power. You have a generator. You could have had elevators. What’s this thing about no magnification above a certain point? You can only have a certain-sized glass. That becomes part of the story. The ‘relics’ are a really big

**“You need to tantalise. You need to delay it, but you have to deliver or you lose the audience”**

one. There are certain things that come from the Before Times that are allowed. We find out Juliette’s watch is fine because it is a functional artefact and there’s not a lot of mystery to it. Other objects appear and we have fun with that. There’s a key relic that we will be stringing out through the course of the whole series. Why aren’t you allowed to have relics? There is an answer to that later on.

“Then there are reproduction rules,” he adds. “Everyone can’t just have kids when they want to have kids. You have to apply to a lottery because you have limited resources. You have to conserve things. You can grow some stuff.”

From top to bottom, *Silo* boasts an impressive cast of actors, including Tim Robbins, Rashida Jones, David Oyelowo, Common and Rick Gomez, to name just a few. Ferguson takes centre stage as the lead

character. Yost admits to being unfamiliar with her earlier Swedish body of work, slasher film *Drowning Ghost* and the soap *Nya Tider*. It wasn’t until the epic miniseries *The White Queen* that American audiences began to take note of her talent. Yost’s original introduction to Ferguson, however, came courtesy of *Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation*.

“I fell in love with her as a performer,” Yost enthuses. “Rebecca is an amazing actor. And she can also jump up on someone’s shoulders and choke them out. She’s physical and she loves bragging about doing her own stunts. She’s also hysterically funny.”

Ferguson didn’t immediately sign up for *Silo*. “We went out to her and at first she said no,” he continues. “Morten Tyldum, who directed the first three episodes and *The Imitation Game*, and I were like, ‘Really? I had thought we did a good job. I thought we had her.’ But Apple kept on hearing from her agent saying, ‘Have you cast it yet?’ Clearly, she was intrigued. Finally, we had another meeting and she was in. Imagine our relief.”

## END GAME

Being strung along without any pay-off can become frustrating, but Yost explains that the writers have already mapped out past season one, so any concerns regarding how much to disclose and what to hold back have already been addressed.

“We have this writer, Katie DiSavino, who was on *Nancy Drew* for a while,” says Yost. “She talks about the ‘card turns’ and the ‘clue paths’, so we do pay attention to some of the structuring of a mystery story. It’s important to give the audience and our characters big advances.

“At the same time, it’s our goal to say, ‘Yes, but what about this? Now you have a new mystery.’ It’s really balancing that out. You need to tantalise. You need to delay it, but you have to deliver. Otherwise, you lose the audience. This should be a fun ride. That’s our goal.”

These days, showrunners often seem to have an endgame in mind. A series-long plan allows them to pace the beats without dragging on and on – or, worse, getting cancelled before wrapping up any dangling threads. Yost notes that Howey penned three books... but it certainly sounds like there might be potential for more.

“Back of the napkin: four seasons,” Yost concludes. “We would tell a good story. There are several writers in the writers’ room who will joke, ‘Okay, in season five...’ Frankly, we want to keep going. We love the world. We love the characters. We love the people we are working with. So you don’t want to ever stop it. But there is a natural course for this story. A mystery cannot go on forever.” ●

*Silo is on Apple TV+ from 5 May.*



## HEROES & INSPIRATIONS

# CAMERON CHAPMAN

WHAT MAKES A GHOST HUNTER TICK?  
THE MAN INSIDE LOCKWOOD'S SHARP  
SUIT SHARES HIS FAVES

Words by Darren Scott /// Portrait by Pip



CAMERON CHAPMAN would have dazzled in another field entirely had life gone another way. Or indeed, on another field, as his childhood aspirations were to excel in sport. "I guess I just didn't have the sort of talent you need," he shrugs. "I loved sport. I used to swim 24 hours a week, play tennis and football quite seriously. But I was just, unfortunately, never good enough. If you ask any of my friends, they'll tell you he really wishes he was a footballer."

Well, it turned out alright for another lead actor in a genre show, one Mr Matt Smith...

"The producers of *Lockwood & Co* worked with him on *Last Night In Soho*. I remember talking to Nira Park, our executive producer, about how I wish I'd been a footballer, and she told me about Matt Smith. I think he was probably far better than me," he laughs.

"I almost had a feeling everyone else had a head start," he says of turning to acting seriously when he was 16. "That just excited me that that was a challenge. It gave me a real ambition and hunger for something, which I think maybe I was losing with sport fading out. I had a bit of extra drive to go and achieve something in this field."

Landing the titular character in the Netflix adaptation of *Lockwood & Co* as your first gig is pretty big on the achievement list. But what of the people who inspired his journey to Portland Row?



Benedict Cumberbatch: gateway to theatre.

### ACTORS

My first idol with acting was... I saw *Hamlet* at the Barbican when I was about 15 and it was Benedict Cumberbatch, who I obviously knew: 'Oh, he's a great actor, he's someone you look up to as an actor.' But the physicality and the dedication and precision that he worked with for what must have been about three and a half hours, with really heightened text... I was just blown away by it.

I didn't know theatre could do that to someone. I wasn't someone that was taken to a lot of theatre as a young person. I've always enjoyed it, but I'd never gone out of my way to watch it, and I thought it was stunning. Whilst I maybe didn't understand what they were talking about, I just thought that's such an achievement to dedicate yourself with such honesty and commitment. And it looked like a challenge. It was around that age that I stopped doing sport seriously. I turned this into thinking, "I'm not going to make it in sport, why don't I give this a go?"

### DIRECTORS

I love Wes Anderson, always have, back to when I was nine years old watching *Fantastic Mr Fox* on my iPod Nano, and I've no idea why I loved it. Maybe something slightly peculiar in my brain found it so satisfying. *The Grand Budapest Hotel* stuck out to me →





GROOMING: ALYSSA KRAUS / STYLING: GRACE GILFEATHER



**“I was lucky in that my film studies teacher opened up my eyes to cinema”**

because I thought it was accessible enough for a 14-year-old to love and understand and yet have serious themes to it. I think now, as I'm older, I have more appreciation for achievements in filmmaking.

I was watching *All Quiet On The Western Front* the other day, and I was stunned at the achievement. Not only is it an amazing film, but there's the achievement of making it, the reality of making a film, or a TV show, and how gruelling it can be and how hard the crew and the cast and a production team will work to create something. You can never look at it the same once you step over the line.

Anderson was the first filmmaker where I went out of my way [to see it], even though I wasn't particularly cultured in film. I appreciated his work enough to go and find his early films and watch them all through and see which ones I liked and didn't like.

It was the same with Nicolas Winding Refn and Denis Villeneuve. All super film-bro choices nowadays. I guess you can't be ashamed of your taste. I was lucky in that I did film studies at secondary school and my teacher opened up my eyes to cinema – foreign cinema, old-school British/American cinema – and it gave me a real appreciation and education, I think, in all types of films. →



Wes Anderson with *Fantastic Mr Fox* and friends.



*All Quiet On The Western Front*: “amazing”.

GETTY, NETFLIX



The *Lockwood* cast have at director Joe Cornish.

## LIVE BY THE SWORD

**“I’M PERSONALLY NOT SOMEONE WHO ENJOYS WATCHING THEMSELVES”**

Becoming the living embodiment of a Young Adult hero

**How do you tackle taking on an established character?**

It started off with the scripts, that's the foundation block to build it all from. Then reading the books as well gave us bonus material to pull from, and then the production team were really supportive. We got to talk to Jonathan Stroud, the author of the books, and we had experts in the

books providing us with glossaries and stuff for quick use on set. But I guess there does come a point where you have to take ownership for it yourself – you sort of get your hand held for a couple of weeks, and then they go, “Fly away with it”. It felt really like a supportive atmosphere to work within and a real pleasure to take on such a fun character.





**What was the costume-fitting process like?**

► I think the first time I wore the costume there was a Covid flare-up, and we were all at home, very early on in the process. I got the costume sent to me, so I could tailor it for myself on FaceTime with the costume guys. But it was cool walking around my apartment in his suit and his jacket. I'm not sure I'm allowed to say this, but they even sent me the sword! Which was really cool to have in my house for a couple weeks.

**Did you get a lot of sword fighting practice in?**

► We had to do courses, stunt

training, movement training and stuff, and work with a movement choreographer on everything about him. That was a really useful way for me to inhabit his character. Joe Cornish said it was really vital to his physicality. That kind of gave me a nice way to settle into it.

**Have you experienced much of the *Lockwood* fandom online?**

► One of the exec producers, Rachel, sends us TikToks or fan art occasionally, which is cool, really nice to see. We were talking about this the other day: maybe you don't want to see that yourself, because you can just see you saying lines, and I'm personally



not someone who enjoys watching themselves. But some of the edits are amazing. I mean, seriously, seriously impressive work. But also, it will be someone's way of showing appreciation, and it's a form of gratification for us to know that people invest in the show like that.





Wu-Tang Clan:  
the authentic  
sound of leafy  
Surrey.

“When I was about 15 I went to New York and grew an affection for New York rap”

## AUTHORS

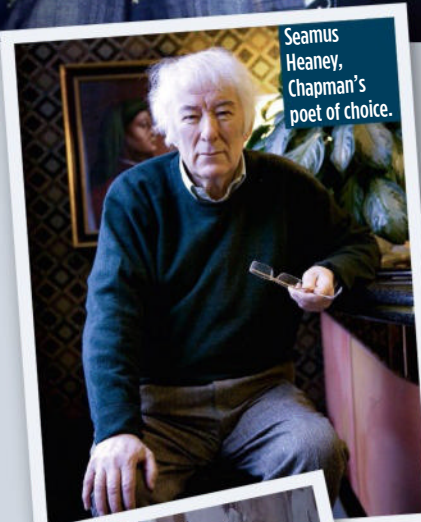
I've never had a yearning, if I've read one book from an author, to go and read the rest of their bibliography, like I have with filmmakers. I love poetry, maybe more so than anything else: Seamus Heaney, Edgar Allan Poe, the basics. I love mountaineering books. My parents are really into mountains. Especially my dad – and my brother.

Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* is one of the only books that made me cry. An amazing book, really sad story. I think I like mountaineering books because it's so different from what I take part in on a weekend, it's such an escape. I realised that sounds debauchorous as soon as I said it – I watch a lot of sport at the weekend!

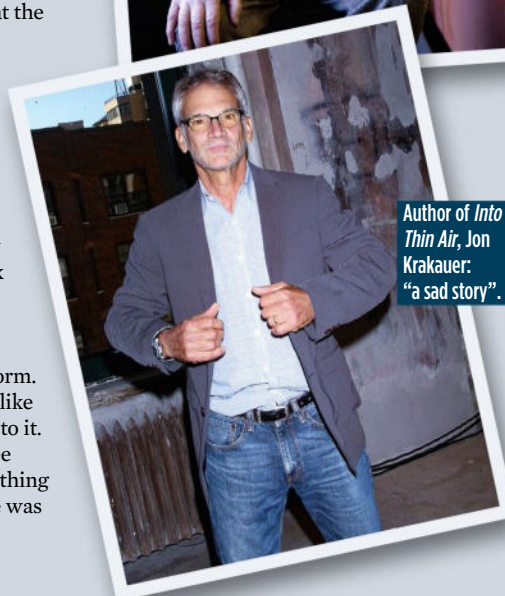
## MUSICIANS

Music's the one that when I was younger, it was never really a thing. My parents never really played music around me. I just remember Led Zeppelin in my dad's car. When I was about 15 I went to New York and I grew an affection for New York rap, and hip hop. No idea why. I think maybe because it was so different to my upbringing. Beautiful lyricism a lot of the time, especially in older works. Just an amazing, and slightly misunderstood art form.

I remember I felt sort of weird about it, like I was doing something wrong by listening to it. I played it in the car with my dad just to see what he thought – it must have been something like Kendrick Lamar or Wu-Tang Clan. He was



Seamus Heaney,  
Chapman's  
poet of choice.



Author of *Into Thin Air*, Jon Krakauer:  
“a sad story”.

really interested in it and interested as to why I find it interesting. I grew up in Surrey, I wasn't overly privileged or anything but I grew up in a safe, pretty boring neighbourhood. So maybe that's the attraction to it. If it was dangerous when you're 15, it feels cool.

As I got older my tastes became more eclectic. So now I listen to an equal amount of Bob Dylan to A\$AP Rocky. I love Johnny Cash. I love Bob Dylan. I love Elvis. The greats.

For *Lockwood & Co*, on set I had this tradition that's become very popular with actors now – our drama school tutor Patricia told me to make a playlist for your character, every time you take on a new character, and that's really stayed with me. It's actually introduced me to music that I maybe wouldn't have come across before.

## SPORT

My sporting heroes are Steven Gerrard and Fernando Torres, who used to play for Liverpool. That's the football club I support. I grew up watching them give just amazing world class performances and that's just who I wanted to be as a child.

One of the things I did when I first got the *Lockwood & Co* job – I'd been a student for three years, so I hadn't really bought anything for myself for a while – was I bought a Fernando Torres signed jersey. It takes pride of place in my living room.

I think it's almost cooler when people have an appreciation for a field that they don't work in. I guess when you watch sports, half the





Succession,  
Jesse  
Armstrong's  
hit series.



House Of  
The Dragon  
featuring Matt  
Smith.

attraction is you're watching people who are elite at something and you couldn't do what they do. It's just so impressive to watch. I think that's part of the reason I loved sports so much as a kid, because it's such a challenge.

## TELEVISION

Now I have a huge appreciation for people's work on TV and TV programming. I think it's becoming a lot more respected and less frowned upon now, less looked down the nose at, because I think making TV shows is really difficult. It'll take you at least double the time to make a TV show than it will to make a film. It's quite a gruelling process at times.

Succession is just immaculate. I never watched *Game Of Thrones* – I must be the one person that never watched *Game Of Thrones*. I did watch *House Of The Dragon*, I thought that was just electric. I don't know if it matches up to *Game Of Thrones* in fans' opinions. I hope they don't get mad at me for saying that.

I watched *Suits* with my dad. It was one of the only things we ever watched together, really. I don't know if that's still going. [It isn't – Ed]

## ART

I love art. I used to really not like it when I was younger. I did an audition for drama school with a monologue from a play called *Red* by John Logan. That was about [abstract expressionist painter] Mark Rothko and

Andy Warhol,  
a belated  
artistic  
interest.



Chapman has  
a signed jersey  
from Fernando  
Torres.

his assistant. I just loved the script, I thought it was amazing and it made me curious to learn a bit more about art. I went to the Tate Modern back when they still had the Mark Rothko Four Seasons collection and I was just amazed. I don't know why, I've no idea why, but suddenly, I fell in love with it. And I feel like I understood it for me.

I always thought, as a kid, it's belittling because I don't get it [art in general]. But I think I realised at the age of 17 or whatever that it's not about what other people think about it. And I'm definitely not a super-cultured art connoisseur, but I understand what I see in it, and what I feel from it. So people like Basquiat, Mark Rothko, Andy Warhol. And then maybe more classical people like Turner, Goya. I think that's because it's quiet. I'm not a big loud person. I like quiet things.



Mark Rothko,  
subject of the  
play *Red* by  
John Logan.

## PERSONAL

The last thing I'd mention is the first person that told me the realistic life of acting, and gave me a perspective on it that was real and not just surface level. I did a course with the National Youth Theatre when I was 17 and my course leader, Abi, who was very talented, directed me and the whole group really well. I totally understood what she needed and wanted in certain tasks. For the first time it clicked, I felt.

I asked her whether it's worth doing, what's this really like? Because all you get told when you tell people "I guess I want to be an actor" is, "Oh God, practise your waiting tables". I've done that as well, nothing wrong with doing that, but it's obviously not what you think you want to be part of. You just imagine working on these massive projects all the time and working with these big amazing people that you look up to.

Abi gave me a realism about it and a reminder about the discipline that I'd been taught in sports and the dedication that you need. It's not just a big party, this industry. It requires a bit of sacrifice and a bit of gritting your teeth sometimes. Not to go "Woe is me" – an actor has a very privileged life. But it was the first time someone had been honest with me about, "This is what it would take. You can do this, but you need to know these home truths before you embark on it." ●

*Lockwood & Co* is on Netflix now.





# WHAT KATY DID NEXT

IT'S BETTER THE SEA DEVIL YOU KNOW FOR RETURNING  
DOCTOR WHO STAR **KATY MANNING**

WORDS: **ROBBIE DUNLOP**

**M**OMENTS BEFORE JODIE WHITTAKER regenerated into David Tennant (what?!) in the *Doctor Who* BBC centenary special, fans were treated to a very special, and quite unexpected, coda. "It was the one secret that didn't get out," smiles Katy Manning. "Nobody knew."

The Doctor's loveable UNIT lab assistant and, latterly, globetrotting environmentalist Jo Jones (né Grant) was back, and this was no happy accident. Fandom partied like it was 1973.

"You learn to keep secrets in this business," Manning tells *SFX*. "There are all these different [Big Finish] audios that I did a long time ago and I'm unable to talk about them. It's hard. I did one with Sir Derek Jacobi and I don't think it came out till 18 months later. A lot of people then said, 'So that's what you were doing!' You have to forget you ever did it."

When it came to "The Power Of The Doctor", the highly publicised return of Jo's fellow time travellers Tegan (Janet Fielding) and Ace (Sophie Aldred) was a convenient diversion. "I would say how wonderful and excited I was for the girls and how terrific it all was – but I couldn't say anything about my role. People kept saying, 'Are you coming back?' I went, 'No!'"

The whole universe (and her dog) are now privy to the support group that Jo attends alongside her fellow TARDIS travellers, spanning the series' very first episode to the current day. "It was an absolute joy to meet Bradley Walsh and John Bishop," Manning says. But her "absolute touching moment" was with

William Russell, who played Ian. "I've done conventions and get on really well with William and his wife. I loved him in *Sir Lancelot* when I was a tiny little person. It was just so touching to see him smiling. He's 98 now, and he's marvellous.

"And of course, there was Bonnie [Langford] whom I adore, and when Sophie and Janet came in – I thought, this is ridiculous, here's old Jo in her seventies having this marvellous moment. And Katy too."

Manning watched the story with her cousin and their four-legged friend – who proved to be something of a distraction. "I was so interested in seeing the girls that I kind of forgot about me. I thought maybe they'd decided not to use my moment, because it did come right at the very end. I turned away to play with the dog, as is my wont in life. I blinked. I heard my cousin gasp. And then I looked back and of course, realised I'd missed it."

So she hadn't told her cousin? "My family haven't a clue about my life at all," she laughs, "let alone about *Doctor Who*!"

Jo's cameo came 12 years after her previous telly escapades in spin-off *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, written by current showrunner Russell T Davies.

With Davies promising further spin-offs in 2024, would Manning be up for another venture into the Whoniverse?

"I think it would be lovely to see Jo pop in to help somewhere along the line, but I don't know how many people would want to see me," she mulls, before considering her character's 52-year impact.

"Jo is such an interesting character because of the years she's grown up in front of fans. For the little kiddies she's →









granny Jo, but for the older ones she's still Jo. She's had a very long and wonderful life in *Doctor Who*; she hasn't got stuck at any age group, and that gives her a lot of legs. She would be a lovely person to have back on one adventure. Jo's such a gentle, sweet, caring person. But boy, if you cross her..."

Until any opportunities for a return come her way, Manning will relish watching *Doctor Who* as a fan. And then, who knows? "I don't second-guess what anybody's going to do," she explains, "because you spoil your moment if you think about what's going to happen next. But whatever comes out of this will continue to be exciting and wonderful."

## BABY LOVE

While we wait for any news on Jo's future, fans have the opportunity to reacquire themselves with her past. Season nine is the final collection of Manning's classic *Doctor Who* adventures to materialise on Blu-ray, despite being the second of the three seasons she filmed. Timey-wimey and all that.

Out of the five stories featured, one – "The Sea Devils" – introduced a race of reptilian, ocean-dwelling monsters which continued to resurface as recently as Easter 2022. Manning enjoyed "Legend Of The Sea Devils" but has one quibble with her old frenemies: "I didn't feel that they were really *Sea Devils* because

**“Everything's going to be beautiful for the fans, clear and wonderful... They will love it”**

I didn't see them under the sea," she laughs, before recalling the "extraordinary experience" of watching the original 1972 monster performers wading into the icy Portsmouth waves. "The costumes were wonderful on land but once they got into water, little bits came off and you'd see the odd flipper floating about – which of course you don't see in the show."

The story's newly remastered picture may be less forgiving – but Manning can't wait for it to be seen and enjoyed. "Everything's going to be beautiful for the fans, clear and wonderful," she smiles. "They will love it. Me, I don't even like High Definition!"

Manning ventured back to a number of her old season nine haunts – including southeast London's Chislehurst Caves – for several documentaries including "Location, Location, Location".

"We had to get to the Isle of Wight and back," she recalls of her voyage to the *Sea Devils*' motherland. "I come in on a boat! And now we've got drones, it's like an incredible travelogue. We were all over the place in three days."



Discovering a Dalek army in "Planet Of The Daleks".



The gang's all here in "Terror Of The Autons".

While making the features she reminisced with season nine cast members Anna Barry, Garrick Hagon and John Levene, and "The Sea Devils" director Michael Briant. "Every time I've seen them since, it's like you only saw them yesterday," she says. "There's some fascinating stuff. You hear so many stories about how it was done, what we were up against. You see the finished result, but what goes into it is always a hell of a lot more. I learnt so much."

Reunions weren't limited to friends. As part of "Defenders Of The Earth", a short film released online to coincide with the box set's announcement, Manning found herself face to face with a *Sea Devil* and its new-born *Sea Sprog*. "Seeing the baby *Sea Devil* was beyond divine," she smiles. "[Visual effects artist] Mike Tucker did such a beautiful job. I mean, who's not going to want a baby *Sea Devil*?"

The trailer was partly filmed in Bristol's "incredible" Redcliffe Caves. "You wouldn't think that there were caves there," Manning notes. "You look up and see these beautiful houses. And then we drove further on to outside Clifton where there's this really amazing beach. There's 200 steps down onto it, so anybody in the crew who'd forgotten something was going to be very fit!"

As was '70s *Doctor Who* tradition, freak weather conditions were the order of the day. "We had snow," Manning recalls. "The poor make-up lady... There's nothing you can do with the hair and the fact that you're turning blue. But then, I'm used to that – I spent years doing that."

The film was written and directed by Pete McTighe, a stalwart of the Blu-ray trailers. Manning says he was an "absolute joy" to work



With Patrick Troughton as the Doctor.



Alpha Centauri. Not suggestive.





Who stars past and present... It's about time!



NICOLA BRYANT

Manning with the late Elisabeth Sladen.



Shooting in Bristol for the season nine trailer.

with, in part for listening to her ideas. "This was always my experience back in the day on *Doctor Who*," she says, before adding: "But it was very sad to do it without Stewart."

Manning refers to Stewart Bevan, her long-time friend who played Professor Cliff Jones in season 10's "The Green Death" and her two previous trailers. Bevan sadly passed away in February 2022 – and in the world of *Doctor Who*, Cliff has gone too.

"It was important to be able to see that Jo's grown from this 21-year-old innocent, all the way through to her husband of 50 years going on his awfully big adventure. You've got the loss, but the determination to carry on in his name. It was really a lovely little piece, with love for Stewart and the character he played."

Manning and friends also watch and discuss episodes of *Doctor Who* in "Behind the Sofa", a regular feature of the Collection Blu-rays. "I love doing it," she says. "I have huge memories of all sorts of bits and pieces. There are stories of the fun and hard work and freezing cold and all of those things that go with it."

"And there were things happening in your life as well, so your memories are always going to be slightly different to fans looking at it who weren't there. We were all passionate about making it work. The whole team that I worked with back in those days was so caring. Jon [Pertwee] was wonderful."

"But I love doing 'Behind The Sofa' when it's somebody else's box set, because I didn't get to see as much *Doctor Who*, living in Australia, as

people in [the UK] did. It's a wonderful time for me to catch up and see how the other wonderful Doctors and assistants got on. It's terrific, I love it."

"So much heart goes into making these box sets from everybody involved," she adds. "Everybody wants to do the very best they can, and I think it shows."

## PURE JOY

Fifty years after Jo first left the TARDIS, Manning continues to enthrall her fans, just by being herself. She's a much-loved personality at conventions – and it's a feeling that works both ways.

"Every time I do one, it makes me feel so happy to see all of us, all in one place, nothing judgmental going on, just this pure joy of us all sharing something that we're all involved with one way or another. I think that's so lovely. And all the hugging. And knowing everybody, more or less. If you don't, you feel like you do."

"I find it so touching when I hear stories of people who've had some very traumatic times in their life, and this has brought them right through it. Lives that really have been changed in their living rooms by watching *Doctor Who*. We're very lucky, aren't we?"

It's pure serendipity. ●

*Doctor Who: The Collection Season Nine* is out on Blu-ray now.



Jo Grant and the Master: trouble.



Hiding out on planet Spiridon.



## MIA GOTH

The rising star behind Maxine talks *Infinity Pool* and her *X* trilogy

Words by Jack Shepherd

**M**ia Goth's trapped in a Berlin hotel room, having been whisked straight there from an airport. "I haven't seen any of the city yet," she says. "I've just been in the hotel." This isn't the beginning of a horror movie (we hope), but the reality of doing press junkets at the Berlin Film Festival. The actor – who has become one of the buzziest names in show business thanks to leading roles in *X* and *Pearl* – is here to promote her spectacular, trippy, terrifying new movie *Infinity Pool*, from the cursed mind of Brandon Cronenberg.

Although Goth doesn't think she gives good interview answers, *SFX* would like to differ after she reveals new details about *MaXXXine*, the final instalment in the *X* trilogy.

***Infinity Pool* is wild. In one scene, you're screaming with a gun pointed at a bus loaded with people. Is it tricky giving yourself over to a character like that?**

➔ You just have to jump into the deep end and go for it. Otherwise it wouldn't work. And there's something really liberating about that. Especially for me – there's something very quintessentially British about me and I'm always trying to maintain my composure and I'm thinking about what others are thinking. And so it's quite a nice contrast to then be on set and just be totally wild and be able to step outside of that momentarily.

**Has anything surprised you about the reaction to the movie?**

➔ When we were back at Sundance, and we were doing our midnight screening, I was quite taken aback by how funny people thought the movie was. Watching it with a crowd is such a different experience because, the first time around, they had sent me a link and I watched it on my computer in my bedroom, and then to have the total opposite experience of being with a crowd and seeing that reaction. They really picked up on humour that is very particular to Brandon. It's definitely something that should be experienced with a group of people.

**You've become something of a horror queen thanks to *Pearl* and *X*. What is it about the genre that's so attractive to you? And why do you think we're living through such a good period for horror currently?**

➔ Having really talented directors, like Brandon Cronenberg, helm these types of movies is something that has really ushered horror into this mainstream arena. People want to feel something when they watch a movie. You can end up reading these rather bland scripts and they usually end up becoming bland movies, and you watch them and they really don't do anything for you.

People are so desperate to feel something. You go through your day and you go to work, you come home, you have your dinner, and then you can get into this routine of just feeling generally quite numb.

And so you have these watching experiences, and hopefully these communal experiences, where you can watch these movies and it's a surefire way that you're going to react to what you're seeing on screen in some sort of tangible way. And I think people are really drawn to that.

**With *Pearl*, *X* and now *Infinity Pool*, your profile has really been raised. Have you noticed differences in projects you're getting sent – or anything else – because of that elevation?**

➔ I feel that the top of one mountain is just the bottom of another. You achieve something but that feeling dissolves pretty quickly and gives way to other desires and aspirations that you have for yourself. You do one thing and then you end up getting sent a hundred scripts that are pretty much the same thing that you've done before. And that's the last thing that I want, to be boxed in as one thing. I think a nose [for good scripts] is probably one of the most important things that an actor can have, to choose their projects wisely.

**You've previously described *MaXXXine* as being the biggest in terms of scope of the *X* trilogy. Are we going to see Maxine at her most unhinged?**

➔ I see *MaXXXine* as a superhero movie – that's how I read the script. Maxine, as a character, has come a long way. She's a survivor, she's gone through a lot. When we meet her again, in this new world that she's in, she's really fought for everything that she has, and she's not about to give that up. She's going to fight for what she has. She's a badass. There's a strength to her. And she's a really proactive, determined, focused woman. She goes after what she wants, and she's not really going to take no for an answer. ●

*Infinity Pool* is out now.

### BIODATA

From  
London

Greatest Hits  
**Maxine and Pearl in *X*; doomed dancer Sara in *Suspiria*; spa patient Hannah in *A Cure For Wellness*.**

Random Fact  
**Goth's grandmother is the famous Brazilian actor Maria Gladys, and her grandfather is the artist Lee Jaffe.**



“Maxine, as a character, has come a long way. She’s a survivor, she’s gone through a lot”



# UFOs & OAPs

LIVING SPACESHIPS HELP TO SAVE AN APARTMENT BLOCK IN 1987'S QUIANT SCI-FI **BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED**. WE CAUGHT UP WITH DIRECTOR MATTHEW ROBBINS

WORDS: SIMON BLAND

**E**T, *THE GOONIES*, *GREMLINS* – back in the '80s, Amblin Entertainment carved out a pretty solid niche by placing kids into otherworldly situations and spinning their stories into cinematic gold. However, looking back at the early output of Steven Spielberg's pop-culture-sculpting movie powerhouse, one title stands alone for taking the opposite approach.

Released in 1987, *Batteries Not Included* switched the formula by swapping kid heroes for pensioner protagonists and pairing them with a bunch of cute, metal UFO visitors. In a crumbling New York tenement, we meet Frank and Faye Riley (played by real-life couple Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy), an elderly couple whose apartment building and “mom and pop” diner are under constant threat of demolition from pushy developers and their ruthless lackeys.

With Faye's health rapidly deteriorating and closure slowly creeping in, all looks lost for this

quaint corner of the Lower East Side – until the building's colourful cast of residents are visited by a bunch of beady-eyed flying saucers (nicknamed The Fix-Its) that bring a hearty dose of hope and a new lease of life to Frank and Faye's twilight years.

For director Matthew Robbins, it was the project's mixture of the mature and the mystical that initially piqued his interest. It started life as an episode idea for Spielberg's TV series *Amazing Stories*, pitched by filmmaker Mick Garris. The *Jaws* maestro quickly spotted its big-screen potential, enlisting Robbins and Brad Bird – future director of *The Iron Giant* – to flesh it out into a full feature.

“I was drawn to the prospect of working with senior actors that had to be very much the centre of the story,” Robbins tells *SFX*. “We hadn't yet cast Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy but the idea of that couple, their sentimentality and also the worry of Alzheimer's and making that a key part of the story, spoke to me.” →





BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED





It was Cronyn and Tandy's real-life relationship and the unspoken tenderness it brought to the screen that ultimately won them the leading roles. "Steven had all kinds of ideas as to who could play these characters," remembers Robbins.

"He was young enough to have heroes from the earlier generation of American movie actors and there were all sorts of seniors on our original lists. However, I was very attracted to the fact that Tandy and Cronyn were really married. They had appeared together on many productions and I thought their familiarity with one another might be very much in tune with what was needed for this film."

### THE BRAD-Y BUNCH

Joining his loved-up leads were a host of colourful characters that lived in Frank and Faye's building. There was gentle giant and former boxer Harry (Frank McRae), soon-to-be single mum Marisa (Elizabeth Peña), struggling artist Mason (Dennis Boutsikaris) and neighbourhood bad boy Carlos (Michael Carmine) – each of whom set the screen alight in their own grounded way.

"One of the great pleasures of writing the screenplay with Brad was the creation of the ensemble and the people who lived in the building," remembers Robbins. "It was an exercise in how to introduce fully rounded characters in a very short amount of time."

"You had to give them enough vivid situations and reactions so they all had some individuality – and once you have those vivid



Hollywood royalty Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy.

characters, all kinds of dramatic possibilities begin to open up."

And open up they did. Like any good Amblin movie, once Robbins had established his believable world, it was time to inject some magic. "The essence of the movie was to do something I've always been interested in, which is to make a very real world with one fantastical element introduced. It reverberates and ripples out into the lives of the various people who are forced to react to something astonishing," says Robbins. "With *Batteries Not Included*, that was a vanishing Lower East Side with added flying saucers."

Speaking of which, when the building's otherworldly visitors finally arrive, Frank and Faye's world is transformed from bleak to whimsical via some trademark Spielberg fantasy. "We went through endless designs with the Industrial Light & Magic model shop

and storyboard artists," recalls Robbins, detailing how he landed on the almost Happy Meal toy look of the sentient saucers that delight in fixing broken things. "We wanted to give them individuation so you could tell one from the other. That was very important, and also to give them personality."

When it came to bringing the machines to life, Robbins's crew had to think on their feet: "To introduce something flying through a set is of absolutely no technical interest at all today, but back then it was a major worry because not only would you see a dangling wire, which was the most obvious way to try and do it, but anything dangling is going to swing around."

Thankfully, a member of the crew came up with an idea that involved a long pole with a sturdy piano wire attached to it. At the end of this taut steel cable was one of the film's playful saucers, alongside other contraptions that

## All That Jazz

The composer behind *Aliens*, *Willow* and *Cocoon* switched gears to create a throwback score

With charm delivered by its human and robot stars, *Batteries Not Included* was rounded out by a robust score from movie maestro James Horner. "I was delighted by it," says Robbins. "The idea was to utilise music from the heyday of Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy's characters, and that called for a big-band sound. I was acquainted because my father was a collector of jazz records, but it was nothing compared to James. He was very knowledgeable and called on various studio musicians that he had come to know; people that played in the big bands of the '40s and '50s."

"James had a great empathy for the emotional ups and downs of the story and was able to address them within the tonality of the instruments. Among James Horner's admirers, this score holds a special place."



Michael Carmine as the very dodgy Carlos.

Mason (Dennis Boutsikaris) can't believe his eyes.



Faye Riley (Tandy) gets to know a Fix-It.



Robbins teaches a grandmother to suck eggs.



Spot the wires! An off-screen moment.



## “The steel wires would glisten under the lights, so we used coloured talcum powder”

helped hold it securely in place. “It was under extreme tension, so you could go up to the spaceship and push against it but it wouldn’t move. It was as if it was a solid bar connected to the rod,” describes Robbins. “You could take this arm and swing the spaceship into the set and it would glide in and stop dead, it wouldn’t swing. It was hugely impressive, and you could do anything you wanted.

“We’d have these things do 360s with their lights on, they were fully manipulable in every direction,” he explains, adding: “It was subsequently used on other ILM productions because it was a good way to fly spaceships in front of green screens. They used this rig until the digital era, but it was created for *Batteries Not Included*.”

Although there was one small issue: “We discovered that the steel wires would glisten under the lights, so we had people on set with coloured talcum powder. If there was a brown chair, they’d put brown talcum powder on that part of the wire. It sounds like something from another century,” he chuckles. “It was another century.”

However it wasn’t just flying scenes that Robbins had to worry about. In between fixing Faye and Frank’s run-down apartment block, their new interstellar friends walked, ran, fell into liquids and even gave birth. To pull off these effects in a pre-CG world required the filmmaker to make use of talent from all corners of the effects arena.

“The stop-motion was done by Phil Tippett and the late David W Allen, who were both part of this whole generation of guys that worshipped at the altar of Ray Harryhausen,” says the director. “They found their way to ILM and we used conventional stop-motion for various scenes, then some greenscreen for when the saucers were flying around the city.”

More than three decades on, Robbins is still all too aware of just how much work went into creating effects that today could be done in no time at all with a simple laptop: “We basically used the full panoply of ILM departments to execute something that today would be of zero technical interest,” he laughs.

Robbins is the first to admit his surprise at the endurance of his quaint little film. The filmmaker has since turned his talents to screenwriting – penning scripts for Guillermo del Toro’s *Mimic* and *Crimson Peak*, as well as the director’s recent adaptation of *Pinocchio* – and every so often he’s reminded of the film’s lasting impact.

“As the years have gone by, I’ve been touched and delighted to discover

## A Friend Of The Force

Director Matthew Robbins discusses the role he played in a galaxy far, far away



*Batteries Not Included* director Matthew Robbins attended USC School of Cinematic Arts, where he became fast friends with another filmmaker – a certain George Lucas. Not only that, but it was Robbins who first introduced Lucas to Ralph McQuarrie, the illustrator who was instrumental in visualising most of the *Star Wars* universe.

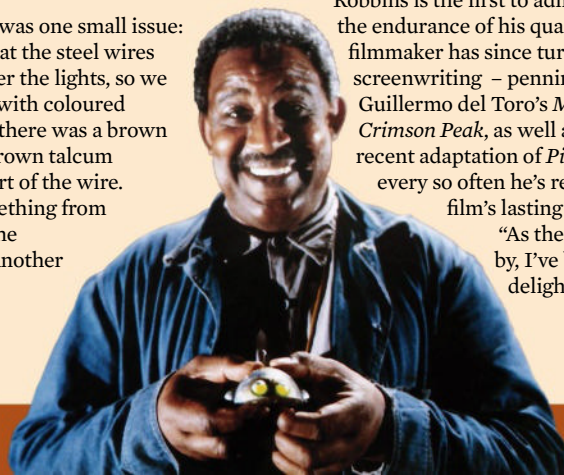
“We commissioned Ralph to make four paintings,” says Robbins, recalling a collaboration with McQuarrie on a science fiction project he was developing early in his career. “He’s a genius and made us look great. George saw the paintings and wanted to meet him, so we took him with us to where Ralph was working. I remember George looking at the illustrations on the wall and saying, ‘I’ve got this science fiction movie coming up, we might want to talk.’ That’s how they met, and it turned out to be a historic collaboration.”

people still have such fond memories of the movie,” he tells *SFX*. “It’s strange to see that it had such an impact, probably more than I was aware of at the time.

“It was not that successful,” he says candidly. “It earned its money back but didn’t do much in the way of big profits, but it got a respectable reception from critics because of the acting. Over the years, I’ve had startling encounters with movie executives much younger than me who will happily tell me that *Batteries Not Included* was either the first movie they ever saw or their favourite childhood movie,” smiles Robbins.

“You really realise you’ve become a veteran when the people who now run the show in Hollywood were under 10 when they first saw this movie,” he laughs. “But I’m gratified to know that people remember it, and fondly.”

*Batteries Not Included* is available now on Prime Video.





## MAT OSMAN

Capital gains: Suede's bassist discusses his new career as a novelist

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Portrait by Tom Medwell

**G**O BACK THROUGH THE HISTORICAL records and it can be tough to access the lives of those who, in their own time, were considered unimportant. Yet, says Mat Osman, British history is full of people who “were kind of kept down but were incredibly ambitious and wanted to make their voices heard”.

He's talking about the kinds of characters who inhabit his second novel *The Ghost Theatre*, a tale of Elizabethan England centred on the world of child actors who live and work in Blackfriars. The theatre was the “Netflix of its time”, but young actors had little power and could be press-ganged into walking the boards.

“They were the most famous working-class people in London,” says Osman of these boys, “but at the same time they were incredibly lowly. Acting was seen as on a par with prostitution – and was tied up with prostitution. You were genuinely the lowest of the low, toilet-cleaner level.” There are parallels, he adds, with boy bands and girl bands in the '80s and '90s, fronted by singers whose stardom generated vast sums of money they never personally saw.

But what if these boys could make themselves heard, more like punk rockers demanding to be heard on their own terms? That's precisely what happens in *The Ghost Theatre* when child actor Nonesuch, aided by his colleagues and by Shay – a messenger, fortune teller, prompter and hawk handler – begin to organise performances, improvising pieces that deal with their own lives rather than simply being intended to amuse the paying public.

## LOST IN MUSIC

The book's behind-the-greasepaint scenes are vividly drawn – hardly surprising given that Osman is the bass player with Suede. To be on stage himself, he says, is to be “entirely present in the moment”. For Shay, things are very different. She gets so lost performing that she dissociates, and cannot remember what she does.

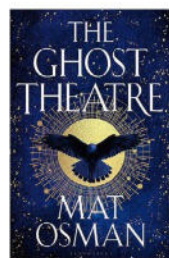
It was an idea inspired by *Rat Girl*, Throwing Muses singer Kristin Hersh's autobiography. “When she started off, she would black out when she went on stage,” says Osman. “She couldn't remember any of it. She'd find herself backstage and she'd have to ask people, ‘What did we play? What did I say? What did I sing?’ I was so fascinated with that idea that something takes you over in certain states – in the act of being on stage, the act of being in love, in the act of madness – that something bolder and less logical takes you over.”

## BIODATA

From **Welwyn Garden City**

Greatest Hits **Osman's first novel *The Ruins* (2020) was a story of twin brothers who hadn't spoken in decades. Ian Rankin called it “a complex, woozily dream-like novel about music, mystery and imagined worlds”. Suede have released nine studio albums.**

Random Fact **Mat Osman also composed the theme tune for Channel 4 panel show *8 Out of 10 Cats*.**



*The Ghost Theatre* conjures up a kind of eerie and fantastical Tudor England, just at the point where you can see the Enlightenment and modernity appearing on the horizon, but it's also a salute to the capital, which Osman has made his home. “I have an outsider's love of London,” he says. “Thank God I wasn't born here, because I think I still have that sense it's incredible I'm allowed to be here.”

Besides, mirroring Sherlock Holmes's remark that “the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside”, it's when you leave the capital that things get really dangerous. This is something Shay discovers when she encounters Cockaigne, a kind of travelling carnival show named after a mythological medieval world of plenty where society is flipped and peasants live like nobles.

## BIG BROTHER

Osman himself was mostly raised in Haywards Heath, north of Brighton. His mother was a teacher, which he says made him posh compared to the rest of Suede, but it was still a working-class background. His grandfather, he remembers, was “one of the smartest people” you could ever meet, someone who did the *Times* crossword in 15 minutes, but left school when he was 14 and “spent his life soldiering and working as a policeman”.

In contrast, his grandson was fortunate enough to live through an “incredible era” where he got a full grant to attend the London School of Economics. This put him in the right place at the right time to form Suede with Brett Anderson, and preempt Britpop with songs that reflected London life in all its gaudy, tattered and romantic glory.

It also made Mat the most famous Osman in his family... at least until his kid brother Richard stepped out from behind-the-camera roles to become first a TV star and then a crime novelist. “I'm really proud of him,” he says, pointing out that Richard's image, rooted in cosy crime, gameshows and Saturday night TV, reflects interests that are genuine. “He had a column for *Golf Monthly* when he was 15,” he laughs, “What 15-year-old is interested in golf?”

After a noughties hiatus in which Osman first began working as a writer, Suede have recently been back on the road, but that doesn't mean Osman has to pause his literary life – it just means he has plenty of time to read. “It's weird, we've gone from being a band who really didn't read much to being basically a library on tour!” ●

*The Ghost Theatre* is published by Bloomsbury on 11 May.



“Acting was  
seen as on  
a par with  
prostitution  
– and was tied  
up with it”



# TOTAL FILM



ON SALE 27TH APRIL



MAY  
2023

edited by Ian Berriman

# Reviews

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## DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: HONOUR AMONG THIEVES

Dicing with death

### Highlights



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#### INFINITI

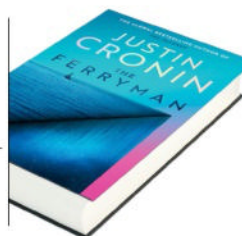
→ An ISS astronaut somehow seems to be both dead and alive in this slow burn French sci-fi drama.



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#### BOB CLARK HORROR COLLECTION

→ Seventies zombie and slasher scares from the cult director.



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#### THE FERRYMAN

→ Justin Cronin's latest novel takes us to an isolated island where life is perfection... Or is it?

→ RATINGS EXPLAINED ★★★★★ SUPERB ★★★★★ GOOD ★★★★★ AVERAGE ★★★★★ POOR ★★★★★ TERRIBLE



## DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: HONOUR AMONG THIEVES

Bard company



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 134 minutes

► Directors Jonathan Goldstein,

John Francis Daley

► Cast Chris Pine, Michelle Rodriguez,

Regé-Jean Page, Justice Smith,

Sophia Lillis, Hugh Grant

► **It starts, appropriately** enough, in a prison cell, and there's no shortage of lizards with incendiary halitosis. But successful movies are not built on dungeons and dragons alone, so we're happy to report that the veteran RPG's latest screen adaptation is also a hell of a lot of fun – just as any good *D&D* campaign should be.

With Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson's genre-defining game riding high on a wave of *Stranger Things*-inspired nostalgia – and screen fantasy also having a moment thanks to *House Of The Dragon*, *The Rings Of Power*, *The Witcher* and the rest – the timing couldn't be better for this new

adventure. And while some children of the '80s will be disappointed it isn't a reboot of the much-loved *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon (fear not, the film does make a sly nod to the TV show), they'll also be relieved that *Honour Among Thieves* has nothing to do with the disappointing 2000 movie headlined by *Lois & Clark's* Justin Whalin.

This incarnation instead borrows a few tips from the *Pirates Of The Caribbean* template. Like Captain Jack Sparrow's first, theme park ride-inspired adventure, *Honour Among Thieves* escapes the shackles of its unlikely

**“Chris Pine hasn't been this much fun since his first outing as James T Kirk”**

source material by powering up the blockbuster action with a plentiful supply of rapid-fire gags. This take on *D&D* resides at the comedic end of the epic fantasy spectrum, a popcorn movie so snappy and quotable that many of the best jokes didn't even make it into the trailers. It also pulls off the enviable trick of staying faithful to the source material while poking gentle fun at its eccentricities.

That's a notoriously difficult alchemy to achieve, but directors/co-writers Jonathan Goldstein and John Francis Daley's obvious love for *D&D* works in their favour. You can barely move for references to the game, but they're

never a barrier to enjoying the story. So where experienced players will recognise fan-favourite monsters such as displacer beasts and gelatinous cubes, novices will simply see a panther with tentacles or a

strangely angular block of carnivorous goop. And even if you're the kind of person who thinks of Eminem's hip-hop collective when someone mentions a D12, you don't need to borrow your mate's *Dungeon Master's Guide* to understand that a Red Wizard is bad.

But the main reason everything hangs together is the cast – in fact, if you were assembling a *D&D* party of your own, you'd want it to look like this dream team of familiar character classes. Chris Pine's Edgin is the nominal lead, a bard and self-proclaimed “planner” whose missing daughter is the film's MacGuffin. Pine hasn't been this much fun since his first outing as James T Kirk, but that may be because – as in JJ Abrams's debut *Trek* – his

“His THACO is off the scale! We need to cheat.”



“I say, chaps, did anyone order a Rogue?”



companions give him plenty to bounce off. *Fast & Furious*'s Michelle Rodriguez (as barbarian muscle Holga), *Jurassic World*'s Justice Smith (as "so-so sorcerer" Simon) and *IT*'s Sophia Lillis (as shapeshifting druid Doric) all get worthwhile character arcs, and even though *Bridgerton*'s Page is woefully underused as Xenk Yendar (a paladin who "does not traffic in colloquialisms"), he steals every scene he's in. It's also fun to see Hugh Grant recycling his panto villain schtick from *Paddington 2* as Forge, a double-crossing rogue.

*Honour Among Thieves* does lose some hit points for its action, which – with the exception of a wonderfully inventive sequence where Doric morphs her way out of Castle Never – feels strangely

unepic. The plotting is also a tad convoluted, although – to give the film the benefit of the doubt – this could be a meta reference to the freeform nature of *D&D* gameplay.

But when it comes to transferring an RPG to the big screen, you're not going to find many better ways to do it. *Honour Among Thieves* riffs on its dense source material to arrive on the big screen feeling fresh and fully formed, with characters you can root for, a steady stream of laughs, and impressive levels of reverence (and irreverence) for *Dungeons & Dragons*. If this is to be the start of a franchise, there's no question *D&D* has earned itself another roll of the dice. **Richard Edwards**

**i** Paramount+ is developing a TV version of *Dungeons & Dragons*, reportedly unconnected to *Honour Among Thieves*.



## PLAN 75

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 12 MAY**

15 | 113 minutes

▶ Director Chie Hayakawa

▶ Cast Chieko Baisho,

Hayato Isomura, Stefanie Arianne,

Yuumi Kawai

### Chie Hayakawa's debut

feature may be rooted in the same generational anxieties that gave us *Logan's Run*, but it summons an altogether subtler dystopia, one whose low-key, prosaic nature makes it all the more chillingly plausible.

In near-contemporary Japan a surplus of senior citizens is draining the economy, crippling the younger generation's prospects and igniting hate crimes against the elderly. The government passes new legislation that legalises assisted dying in the name of the common good, appealing to traditional Japanese notions of self-sacrifice.

Told with a pensive and powerful sense of restraint, the story finds its quiet horror in the smooth apparatus of it all: the paperwork, questionnaires, persuasive adverts and corporate-mandated sympathy that disguise a disturbingly pragmatic approach to an ageing population.

But for all its understated storytelling, this is a film bursting with compassion. Hayakawa offers a number of perspectives, but the empathic heart is Michi, a woman in her late seventies contemplating euthanasia. It's an astonishing performance by veteran Chieko Baisho, who brings raw reality to the screen as she shows us Michi's loneliness, desperation, doubt and, in the moving climax, something more invincible. **Nick Setchfield**



## JUNK HEAD

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 100 minutes

▶ Director Takehide Hori

▶ Cast Takehide Hori,

Atsuko Miyake, Yuki Sugiyama

### Painstakingly assembled

over seven years, this stop-motion feature is essentially the vision of one man: Takehide Hori, whose name appears so often in the end credits he soon feels like an old friend.

Set in a distant future where mankind has lost the ability to reproduce, it follows a cyborg explorer into a subterranean realm, home to a genetically engineered underclass that now views humans as gods – and a bestiary of creatures that owe a clear debt to the terrifying xenobiologies of HR Giger.

It's a tangible environment, with a grimy, industrial aesthetic that permeates every diseased detail. But while it reeks of filth and decay, Hori imbues *Junk Head*'s world with immense charm. There's a twisted cuteness here, enhanced by the hand-tooled vibe, and it's matched by a darkly comic sensibility even as the visuals lurch into the truly grotesque.

The story itself is slim, but technically Hori's work is a marvel. Given the traditional constraints of stop-motion animation it's impressive how the camerawork is so fluid and immersive as it zips us through this deranged underground.

The end credits play over behind-the-scenes footage: far from puncturing the magic, a glimpse of a miniature dolly track only deepens your appreciation of the craft that went into this ingenious, off-kilter fable. **Nick Setchfield**



## RENFIELD

### Master And Servant



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 85 minutes

► Director Chris McKay

► Cast Nicholas Hoult, Awkwafina, Nicolas Cage, Shohreh Aghdashloo

◆ **Nicolas Cage and Dracula** make such an intoxicating combination that it's a wonder it's taken this long for someone to put them together.

For all the lip-smacking relish and diabolical campiness that Cage brings to Bram Stoker's legendary bloodsucker, however, it's his put-upon drudge Renfield who drives this newest iteration. It initially pays due homage to its filmic forebears (most prominently Tod Browning's 1931 version) before spinning off into its own comic, contemporary and graphically violent universe. Nicholas Hoult's Renfield, we

learn in a breathless prologue, has been happy enough over the years sourcing his master's human meals in return for a fraction of his vampire powers. With Drac at a low ebb due to a sunlight-related immolation, though, he's started to query their codependent relationship, a whiff of romance with New Orleans traffic cop Rebecca (Awkwafina) offering a possible alternative to an eternity of servitude.

It's an ingenious twist on a familiar formula, one that makes good use of Hoult's timorous

**“A rare film that might actually have benefited from being a little longer”**



“It's just... you're a bit exhausting at times.”

gaucheness while still delivering a four-course banquet of gory splatstick. It's a pity, then, that director Chris McKay doesn't give it more room to breathe; breakneck pacing and ruthless editing (an elaborate dance sequence was shot but then junked) allow his leads only limited opportunities to shine. This is a rare film that might

actually have benefited from being a little longer.

In Cage, though, it has a star who makes every second count, his unpredictable line readings and live-wire energy providing a jolt of electricity whenever he appears. **Neil Smith**

**i** Flavoured crickets and caramel cockroaches were used in the scenes where Renfield eats bugs.

## EVIL DEAD RISE

### Mommie Dearest



► **RELEASED 21 APRIL**

18 | 97 minutes

► Director Lee Cronin

► Cast Lily Sullivan, Alyssa Sutherland, Morgan Davies, Gabrielle Echols

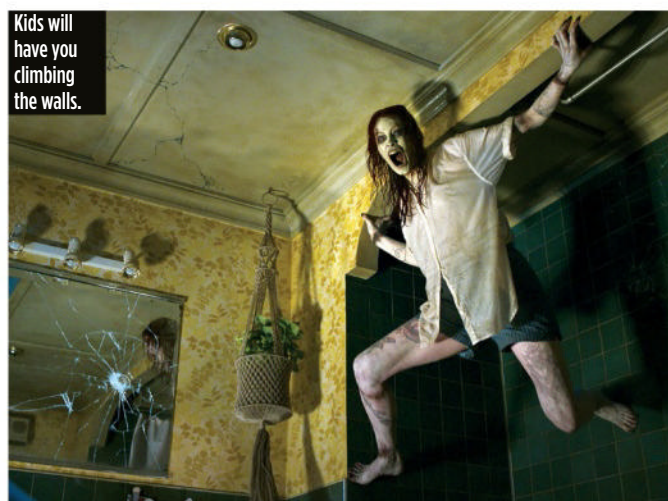
◆ **Is there another horror** franchise as reliable as the Evil Dead series? Forty-one years and five films in we still await a turkey, with this latest iteration jostling for bronze medal position.

Gorehounds will know the drill: cabin in the woods, sinister incantation, demonic possession, extreme violence, dismemberment by chainsaw. Except this time the cabin in the woods is – barring a short prologue – absent, with the carnage unfolding in a rundown LA apartment building after a quake leads to the discovery of a Necronomicon in a forgotten vault. Soon mother Ellie (Alyssa

Sutherland) is on the turn, leaving visiting sister Beth (Lily Sullivan) tasked with protecting her kids.

If you're thinking that such a premise would lead to punches being pulled, think again. Evil Dead Rise's gleeful, wince-inducing extremity arguably surpasses even the nailgun and electric carving knife shenanigans of Fede Álvarez's 2013 take. At the same time, its visceral brutality often has its inherent humour – akin to a Looney Tunes character being flattened by an anvil.

Writer/director Lee Cronin pulls off the tricky balancing act of striving for faithfulness while providing enough innovation to freshen things up. Some may click their tongues at the videogame boss level feel of the climax, but it provides the requisite escalation. Cronin playfully remixes elements like the gliding demonic POV



Kids will have you climbing the walls.

shots and the infamous “tree rape” sequence, and scatters a basketful of Easter eggs – some obvious, others far more subtle.

Expansive production design prevents the domestic setting ever feeling oppressively cramped. Characters are sufficiently well-developed to make us care for them without eating into the running time allotted for spew and

arterial blood spray. And Cronin and Sutherland have great sport with the possibilities for sadistic taunting that mummy-talk affords (“Let me kiss it better”). A film of blood-drenched brio, which Deadites should find delightfully disgusting. **Ian Berriman**

**i** Pay attention to the wallpapers and lampshades – leaf and tree patterns nod to the woods that this entry has left behind.





## SHAZAM! FURY OF THE GODS

### Under The Dome

★★★★☆

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 130 minutes

► Director David F Sandberg

► Cast Zachary Levi, Helen Mirren, Lucy Liu, Rachel Zegler

► **Back in 2019, the first *Shazam!*** brought much-needed heart and levity to a DCEU at risk of drowning in its own portentousness. Three years on and one *Black Adam* later, with James Gunn and Peter Safran's course-correct yet to bear fruit, those same qualities seem to be more needed than ever.

If anything, though, *Shazam! Fury Of The Gods* represents something of a backwards step into the kind of overblown, CG-heavy bombast that characterised the Zack Snyder DC era.

Yes, there's still fun to be had from a wish-fulfilling premise that has foster kid Billy (Asher Angel) turn himself and his friends into invincible superheroes with the help of just two syllables. Once

Helen Mirren and Lucy Liu's vengeful goddesses turn up to take back the powers they claim Billy stole from them, however, the playful humour gets increasingly sidelined in favour of a numbing production line of battle scenes, the last of which acts as a virtual roll call for Ray Harryhausen's creature back-catalogue.

An opening rescue mission on Philadelphia's Ben Franklin Bridge gets things off to a zesty start, while a much-trailed (and potentially final) cameo from a popular DC regular provides a pleasing treat for fans.

For all the boyish glee Zachary Levi brings to Billy's cape-wearing alter-ego, though, this blunderbuss sequel feels weirdly straitjacketed – something it shares with its host city, which spends much of the film beneath the same sort of dome that kept Springfield confined in *The Simpsons Movie*.

Neil Smith

**i** Annabelle, the diabolical doll from the *Conjuring* franchise, features in the scene where Shazam consults a therapist.



65

★★★★☆

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 93 minutes

► Directors Scott Beck, Bryan Woods

► Cast Adam Driver, Ariana Greenblatt, Chloe Coleman, Nika King

► **Scott Beck and Bryan**

Woods, writer/directors of 65, were the originators of the script for *A Quiet Place*, and here they swap the high concept of "people vs blind-but-deadly aliens" for "aliens vs dinosaurs". It's an idea that has entertaining ramifications, yet the result feels far more slight and less effective than what John Krasinski eventually span from their work.

Adam Driver plays Mills, pilot of a space vessel from another world whose passengers are in cryosleep. The ship is downed by an asteroid strike, crashing on Earth... 65 million years ago. The only other survivor is Arianna Greenblatt's Koa, and the two are soon trying to reach a rescue craft before being either a) gobbled by terrible lizards or b) splatted by the asteroid that is coming to change the face of the planet.

Less borrowing a page from *Jurassic Park* and more swiping entire books from Waterstones smuggled under its jacket, 65 sticks to the basics, with the lack of a shared language between Mills and Koa sucking the chemistry from the combo.

That absence is never replaced by anything that really works: a space-going race has fancy digi-scanners, but not a gadget version of Google Translate? Pretty hard to swallow. The dino action is fun enough, though.

James White



## THE OUTWATERS

★★★★☆

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

18 | 110 minutes

► **Thought *The Blair Witch***

*Project* was motion sickness-inducing? Then steer well clear of *The Outwaters*. This found-footage movie is extremely hard to watch – and even harder to make sense of.

The gist is that a small group of filmmakers head into the Mojave Desert to make a music video and end up dead, but everything between the setup and the stomach-churning finale is just pitch-black shakycam and ear-splitting screaming. If this was an experiment, it hasn't proved much. Sarah Dobbs

## ALSO+OUT



You're surely dying to see us discuss the leitmotifs and mise-en-scène of **THE SUPER MARIO BROS MOVIE** (out now) but they didn't screen it until the day before release, so you're (coughs) out of luck. Also proving elusive: **THE POPE'S EXORCIST** (out now), *Overlord* director Julius Avery's take on the real-life figure of Vatican crucifix-waver Father Gabriele Amorth (Russell Crowe). Finally, 20th Century Fox are still trying to make *Alien* Day (26 April, 4/26, LV-426 – geddit?) a thing. Visit [bit.ly/alienscreenings](https://bit.ly/alienscreenings) and [bit.ly/aliensscreenings](https://bit.ly/aliensscreenings) to see if **ALIEN** or **ALIENS** are showing near you.



## INFINITI

### Zoro-astronaut-ianism



UK StudioCanal Presents,  
streaming now

► Creators Stéphane Pannetier, Julien Vanlerenberghe

► Cast Céline Sallette, Daniyar Alshinov, Vlad Ivanov, Karina Arutyunyan

**EPISODES 1.01-1.06** Most SF fans' entire exposure to Zoroastrianism comes from Richard Strauss's "Also Sprach Zarathustra" blasting out over the opening titles of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. But this French sci-fi series rectifies that, throwing a philosophical spotlight on the world's oldest monotheistic religion, whose priests were, as one character puts it, "builders, engineers, doctors, scientists... Science is a religion. Going to space is a miracle."

Going into space is also a political minefield in this complex,

slow-burn series, which combines *For All Mankind* with *True Detective* to create an absorbing though occasionally exasperating sci-fi noir.

The story kicks off with the headless body of a US astronaut being discovered near the Russian Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan; the same astronaut, somehow, who is also currently stranded on the damaged International Space Station following a disastrous docking accident.

The Cosmodrome and the ISS are supposed to be symbols of international cooperation, but arguments over how to mount a rescue mission reveal deep divides between the Russian, French, Chinese and US space agencies. Meanwhile, a local Kazakh cop's investigation into the decapitated corpse is uncovering secrets.

There's much that impresses here. Aside from the liberal infusion of Zoroastrian lore, the self-consciously literary script also has allusions to Joseph Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness*, Greek mythology, Schrödinger's cat and, yes, *2001*. It's also an elegant-looking show, which powerfully contrasts the high-tech Cosmodrome with the squalor of the nearby city of Baikonur and the emptiness of the steppes surrounding it. A multi-language script adds to the richness, and the growing paranoia.

The principle cast are impressive, especially Daniyar Alshinov as Isaak, the dogged Kazakh cop, and Céline Sallette as Anna, a French astronaut with mental health issues who fights a whole raft of gaslighting males to be allowed to rescue her lover – that US astronaut who may or may not be headless.

The show also benefits from a found footage approach to the space effects – often shown only on viewscreens from the POV of onboard cameras; it may have been a budgetary consideration, but the result feels more authentically like the sort of documentary space footage we're used to seeing.

There is, however, a big but. While the plot demands that you pay attention, it's arguable whether the finale's revelations fully repay that attention. Sure, the plot mechanics are pretty watertight but the problem's not what's happening (which is pretty standard modish SF), but *why* it's happening: why certain people act the way they do.

Ultimately, the motivations behind certain key characters' actions are vague at best, absurd at worst. But with so much else to enjoy here, it's best not to waste *Infiniti* dwelling on such things.

Dave Golder

**i** In a nod to HAL in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, in episode six Anna sings "Daisy Bell" while attempting to open an airlock.



## STAR WARS: THE BAD BATCH Season Two



► UK/US Disney+, streaming now

► Head writer Jennifer Corbet

► Cast Dee Bradley Baker, Michelle Ang, Rhea Perlman, Jimmi Simpson

**EPISODES 1.01-1.06** There are plenty of burning questions in the *Star Wars* universe, but "What happened to the Clones?" isn't up there with the biggest. That's a major problem for *The Bad Batch* because, two seasons in, the show feels like it needs to broaden its horizons.

Hunter, Tech, Wrecker, Echo and Omega, aka Clone Force 99, are still doing odd jobs for crime boss Cid, while trying to avoid Imperial entanglements. But as they see how the galaxy's going to the dogs under the Empire, they realise they can no longer turn a blind eye.

Unfortunately, it turns out the early days of Emperor Palpatine's reign aren't quite as compelling as they should be. A story that might have been a four-part arc in *The Clone Wars* feels overstretched at 16 episodes, with so-so missions-of-the-week punctuated by a few stand-out instalments focused on the cruelty of the Empire – the evolution of the Batch's estranged brother, Crosshair, is much more satisfying than theirs.

At its best, *The Bad Batch* illustrates the tragedy of a loyal bunch of elite soldiers being suddenly deemed surplus to requirements. Taken as a whole, however, this season leaves you feeling that more exciting adventures are probably happening elsewhere in the galaxy. **Richard Edwards**





# Reviews



Evidently there's no dog crap in Yonder.

## YONDER Death In Paradise



▶ UK/US Paramount+, streaming now

▶ Director Lee Joon-ik

▶ Cast Shin Ha-kyun, Han Ji-min, Lee Jung-eun, Jung Jin-Young

**EPISODES 1.01-1.06** The digital afterlife may not be the heaven that it's been marketed as in this sombre and contemplative Korean miniseries. Set in a near future where new laws encourage euthanasia, it opens with a lengthy, real-time sequence in which dour journalist Ja-hyun administers a lethal cocktail to his dying wife, Ye-hoo.

Moments after her last breath there's a knock on the door, and Ja-hyun is shocked to learn that Ye-hoo has agreed for her memories to be downloaded – via a chip he didn't even know she'd had implanted – into a new virtual paradise called Yonder. Pretty soon she's encouraging him to join her.

Based on a 2011 sci-fi romance novel, *Yonder* veers away from a *Matrix*-style conspiracy thriller for something more philosophical and slow-moving. Over six half-hour(ish) episodes there's a minimum of plot, with a focus on

emotionally stirring images, underscored by exquisitely delicate music. With Ja-hyun being a journalist you expect him to undertake some huge exposé of Yonder (and that seems to be what his editor wants), but the series only dabbles in corrupt scientists/evil corporation tropes. Similarly, how Yonder actually works in practice is left vague.

Instead the story is more an exploration of how memories – and reliving them – shape the human experience. In some ways it's like a less subtle, humourless version of *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind*. The endearingly earnest cast inject a huge dose of dignity and warmth into the project, and it's often visually stunning and genuinely touching.

But strip away all the mannered storytelling and what's left is hardly the most startlingly original take on “uploading your consciousness”. Plus, the ending is so woolly that you're left wondering if Ja-hyun is simply a hopeless optimist. **Dave Golder**

**i** There's a set – you'll know it if and when you see it – that must be a nod to the Architect's “office” in *The Matrix Reloaded*.

**FILM**

## THE LAST PICTURE SHOW

PODCAST

## IT'S YOUR LAST TIME AT THE CINEMA

WHICH FOUR MOVIES ARE YOU  
PROGRAMMING? AND WHY?

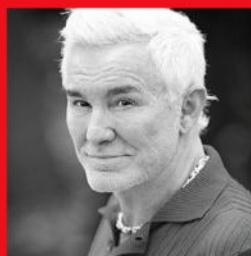
### JOIN OUR CELEBRITY PROJECTIONISTS...



Noomi Rapace



Joe Cornish



Baz Luhrmann



Aimee Lou Wood



## WOLF PACK Season One

### Teen Wolves Too



UK/US Paramount+, streaming now

Showrunner Jeff Davis

Cast Sarah Michelle Gellar, Armani Jackson, Bella Shepard, Tyler Lawrence Gray

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 **Pigeonholing**

clearly holds no fear for showrunner Jeff Daniels. Having guided the TV version of *Teen Wolf* through six seasons (and a recent, dire TV movie) he's now unleashed *Wolf Pack*.

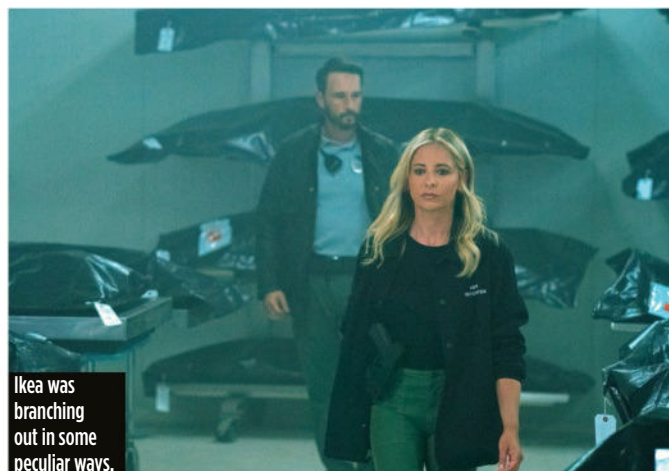
Yep, another lycanthropic teen soap. So you'd think that the new show must deliver some amazing new twist on the genre, right? Well, erm...

To be fair, the series – based on a 2004 book by Edo van Belkom – does introduce some new lore to the werewolf mythology; each member of the pack here has a special power

(super-speed, super-hearing, super-strength etc), but don't expect X-Wolves. Do expect lots of frequently topless teens with super-ripped bodies (even the nerds) having relationship issues in-between bouts of gore and ropery CG creature attacks.

It begins with a Los Angeles forest fire that forces more than the usual wildlife out of the mountains, and arson investigator Kristin Ramsey (Sarah Michelle Gellar) is clearly looking for more than just a common or garden firestarter. Two outsider teens attacked by something fleeing the flames lose their acne and anxiety

**“Expect lots of frequently topless teens with super-ripped bodies”**



Ikea was branching out in some peculiar ways.

attacks and start receiving anonymous phone calls giving them doomy, cryptic messages. Then people start vanishing.

It's glossier than *Teen Wolf*, and its werewolves don't look like a '60s Tom Jones, so that's good. Some effectively tense horror moments liven things up, and eventually Gellar gets something interesting to do after spending too many episodes looking bored.

But the teen characters are uniformly bland, hampered by utilitarian, witless dialogue and a thin plot that struggles to fill eight episodes. Things do perk up for a revelation-packed finale, though, which takes an unexpected turn for the weird.

Dave Golder

**i** Gellar told *Vogue* that the only similarities she shares with her character Kristin are, “We both have really good boots.”

## SWARM

### Crazy In Love



UK/US Prime Video, streaming now

Showrunners Donald Glover,

Janine Nabers

Cast Dominique Fishback, Chloe Bailey, Nirine S Brown, Karen Rodriguez

EPISODES 1.01-1.07 **Donald Glover's**

new show arrived only a few months after the finale of his surreal dramedy *Atlanta*. That series lost some of its sheen over the course of four seasons, criticised for being increasingly bizarre and underserving its female main character.

While it may seem that *Swarm* is a response to that feedback, the show is so unforgiving to its female characters and downright weird that it's more likely to alienate Glover's existing fans than win him new ones.

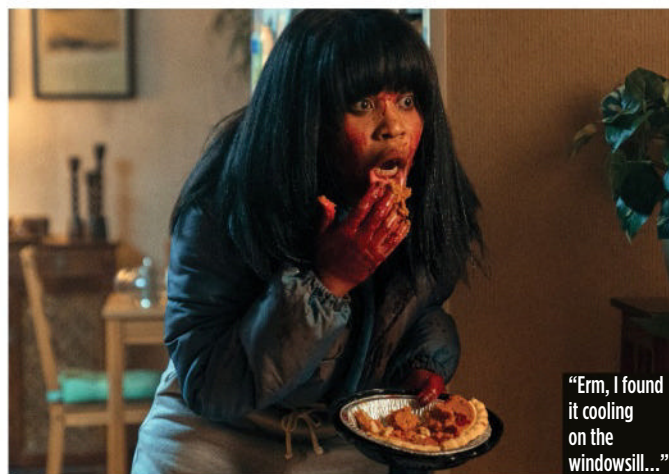
Dre (Dominique Fishback) is a socially awkward serial killer who

is obsessed with Ni'Jah (Nirine S Brown), a pop star clearly based on Beyoncé. After a tragic loss in the first episode, Dre becomes increasingly unhinged and rapidly amasses an impressive body count.

Fishback, best known for her incredible turn in *Judas And The Black Messiah*, proves that wasn't a fluke by creating a fascinating and incredibly unsettling character. But as the show goes on, it becomes clear how little she is being given to work with, underserved in terms of both plot and dialogue.

To Glover's credit, even if the series is a case of style over

**“Akin to a chicken nugget rather than an intricate meal”**



“Erm, I found it cooling on the windowsill...”

substance, that style is a riot; there's an irresistible vibrancy to the music and visuals. Even when the gore gets intense, the show (largely funnier than it is scary) still feels joyously popstastic. But for all that Glover has been lauded as a multi-talented creative genius, *Swarm* feels lightweight; watching it is a pleasure akin to biting into a chicken nugget rather than an intricate meal made with love.

The series leaves us on an ambiguous note, frustratingly unclear as to whether the enjoyably ludicrous events of the final episode are fantasies of a fractured psyche. But with such insubstantial work, it's hard to care much either way.

Leila Latif

**i** Glover was inspired by a tweet saying black women on TV are always lawyers and friends: “We can be murderers too.”





# SUPER HEROES AND SUPER VILLAINS IN EPIC ENCOUNTERS



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This was Tom Savini's first movie make-up job.

## BOB CLARK HORROR COLLECTION

Bob's Kill House

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1972-1974 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Bob Clark

▶ Cast Richard Backus, John Marley, Olivia Hussey, Alan Ormsby

❖ **Though he later received**

Golden Raspberry Award nominations for the likes of *Superbabies: Baby Geniuses 2*, director Bob Clark's early work has seen its critical stock rise over the decades. This box set of his three horror films amply demonstrates why.

The spark for *Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things* came when Clark and pal Alan Ormsby went to see *Night Of The Living Dead* and, as Ormsby jokes, "decided to rip it off". It's a cut-and-shut of a

movie, beginning as a warped black comedy, thick with waspish sniping, and descending into a zombie siege in its final third.

Ormsby, resplendent in garish hippy threads, is an insufferable theatre director who takes his troupe to an island, digs up a corpse and carries out a reanimation ritual, just for giggles. Though rough around the edges, it's oddball fun, with quotably florid dialogue ("Your vilification of Satan is rice pudding!")

*Deathdream* (scripted by Ormsby) is on another level – a riff on "The Monkey's Paw" that anticipates both George Romero's *Martin* and post-Vietnam War dramas like *Coming Home*.

After a family receives the news of their son's death in combat, the

sheer force of the mother's denial somehow brings him back to life. But the young man who returns is strangely altered (a scene where he strangles their pet dog still shocks) and soon begins to physically deteriorate...

Clark's portrait of a fractured family is affecting, and Richard Backus provides an intense, controlled performance as the impassive, undead Andy.

*Black Christmas* – in which a lunatic terrorises sorority house girls – is often cited as a precursor of the '80s slasher boom, and with good reason: John Carpenter was an admirer, and Clark once told him that a putative sequel could see the killer escape an institution, and be titled *Halloween...* remind you of anything?

Clark didn't invent the killer's-POV shot, but *Black Christmas* perfected it, deftly climbing up trellis and through windows with the aid of a shoulder-mounted camera rig.

The psycho's phone calls are disturbing, and tonal gear shifts between violence, comedy and relationship drama are deftly done. A sequence intercutting a stabbing with carol singers is wickedly ironic, and Carl Zittler's discordant score (achieved by torturing a piano's insides with cutlery) is suitably deranged. Carpenter improved upon Clark's model. Very few of those who came after him did.

❖ **Extras** An impressive, if rather repetitious spread. The main draw is *Dreaming Of Death* (73 minutes), an interesting new documentary which assembles cast, crew and critics to consider Clark's career. Also fresh: a well-researched commentary on *Deathdream* by two critics.

*Black Christmas* has the lion's share of the archive featurettes. They include interviews with actors Art Hindle (26 minutes), who digs out a raccoon skin coat he wore, and Lynne Griffin (27 minutes), who recalls being sprayed with catnip so a moggie would lick her corpse. Meanwhile retrospective pieces from 2002 (36 minutes), 2006 (20 minutes), and 2014 (40 minutes) are all solid.

*Children* gets a recent Zoom chat with Alan Ormsby (33 minutes), sadly marred by botched audio. Art director's assistant Ken Goch (nine minutes) recalls eating a joint when stopped by the police!

Of the four old commentaries, the highlight's a lively one with three of the cast of *Children*. *Black Christmas* gets a Clark one that could have used a moderator, one intercutting John Saxon and Keir Dullea, and a gimmick track where voice-of-the-killer Nick Mancuso crazily babbles throughout. Skip it.

Plus: three con/screening Q&As (total 50 minutes); a tribute to the director (10 minutes); *Deathdream* trailer; *Black Christmas* TV/radio spots; two random heavy metal videos; three artcards. **Ian Berriman**

**i** Edmond O'Brien was cast as the sergeant in *Black Christmas*, but his Alzheimer's led to him being replaced by John Saxon.



## THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE

Guess Who's Coming To Dinner



★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1974 | 18 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)

▶ Director Tobe Hooper

▶ Cast Marilyn Burns, Allen Danziger, Paul Partain, William Vail

◉ **If you're of the generation** who, thanks to BBFC director James Ferman's patrician attitudes, first saw *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* on third-generation VHS, you might be startled by how *beautiful* this 4K restoration can be, with its blue-skied Texan landscapes. Once its four young victims enter the domain of the insane, cannibalistic Sawyer clan – a modern-day

analogue of the witch's house in *Hansel And Gretel* – it's a different matter, however.

The lack of gore may surprise newbies. We only see one living person chainsawed by Leatherface, director Tobe Hooper's unknowable, skin-masked freak. And there's barely any blood. The film is disturbing due to its conceptual grimness, nihilistic tone and realisation of a nightmarish hinterland.

Gruesome effects can be dismissed by those aware of the craft involved. It's harder to shrug off well-acted depictions of leering sadism and hyperventilating terror – or remain unmoved by a score

whose insidious industrial rumblings make you feel trapped in a slaughterhouse, waiting for the sledgehammer to fall. A chest-tightening, flinch-inducing X-rated fairy tale.

◉ **Extras** There are three new bonuses. Feature-length doc *The Legacy Of The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (83 minutes) rapidly intercuts critical comments from 16 different talking heads. It's an understandable approach, since the production is already very well-documented, and the interviewee list (which includes the creatives behind various *Chainsaw* sequels) is impressive, but the appeal of hearing multiple people making similar (if valid) points does eventually pall.

Amanda Reyes and Bill Ackerman's new commentary is terrific. Scrupulously prepared, it offers interesting theories and odd tangents, with the motor-mouthed Reyes (who, being Austin-based, could access Hooper's paperwork) rattling off minutiae on, say, the history of Texan barbecue. Finally, there's some pseudo-intellectual waffle about masks (nine minutes) which might as well be a supercut of Charlie Brown's teacher.

Many hours of bonuses from Second Sight's 2014 Blu-ray are also carried over, the highlight being *The Shocking Truth* (73 minutes, 2000), an excellent Making Of doc with plenty of anecdotes about the gruelling nature of the shoot. They also include interviews, a locations tour, deleted scenes, and four old cast/crew commentaries. The Limited Edition 4K & Blu-ray set comes with a 190-page hardback book and six art cards. **Ian Berriman**

**i** The real-life Sawyer house is now a restaurant named Hooper's. Cocktails on the menu include a "Bloody Marilyn".



"Now I just need to think of a clever name."



## JUSTICE LEAGUE X RWBY SUPER HEROES AND HUNTSMEN – Part One

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 24 APRIL**

2023 | TBC | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director Kerry Shawcross

▶ Cast Lindsay Jones, Chandler Riggs, Kara Eberle, Nat Wolff

◉ **If anyone was wondering** what Batman would be like if he was a magical teenager with genuine bat-wings, the latest stylistic left-turn in DC's animation output is ready to answer that question, and more.

It's a team-up between the Justice League and the characters of *RWBY*, a long-running animated web-series that's American-made but heavily Japanese in visuals and approach. The story sees DC's characters regressed to teens as they arrive in the mysterious world of Remnant, where heroes battle dangerous creatures known as Grimm.

Clunky, borderline-nonsensical storytelling combined with over-obvious moral lessons (and a hilariously vague cliffhanger set up for *Part Two*) make for a haphazard experience. However, the cel-shaded CG style also means that the film leans heavily into dynamic, vibrantly animated fight scenes. Taken purely as a stylised anime-style action romp, it's a good deal of fun.

◉ **Extras** Featurettes on the world of Remnant and the animation style; vintage episodes of *Justice League Unlimited* and *Justice League Action*. **Saxon Bullock**



## CREEPING HORROR

Animal cruelty

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1933-1946 | 12 | Blu-ray

▶ Directors Edward Sutherland, Ford Beebe, George Waggner, Jean Yarbrough  
▶ Cast Lionel Atwill, Dick Foran, Robert Lowery, Charlie Ruggles

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** Eureka Video's

latest pailful scooped from the seemingly bottomless well of the Universal back catalogue is by turns gruesomely macabre, tiresome and discomfiting.

The oldest of the box set's four entries, 1933's *Murders In The Zoo*, is the stand-out. Actually a Paramount production later acquired by Universal, it stars Lionel Atwill as Eric Gorman, a man so insanely jealous that he stitches up the mouth of a man with designs on his wife, poisons her lover using an imitation

snake's head, and finally tips her into an alligator pool. Anyone unaware of quite how grisly horror cinema could be before the Hays Code was strictly enforced will be left with their jaw hanging open.

*Horror Island* (1941) is an Old Dark House affair with the emphasis firmly on comedy. Concerning an excursion to a faked-up haunted house, it's crammed with gimmicks like secret passages, trapdoors and suits of armour that fire arrows. Sadly such hi-jinks miserably fail to induce even the slightest twitch in your zygomaticus major, and the only mystery of any note – the identity of a cape-wearing “Phantom” – abruptly fizzles out.

*Night Monster* (1942) assembles an extensive ensemble at the home of the paralysed Curt Ingston (Ralph Morgan), providing a

plethora of suspects as the doctors who failed him are strangled one by one. Leif Erickson impresses as a sex-pest chauffeur, while Janet Shaw steals the show as a wisecracking maid who quips there's nothing wrong with him “a good case of rigor mortis wouldn't cure”. Featuring matter materialisation and lines like “Well, dog my cats!”, this nutty riff on 1932's *Doctor X* has its moments, but fails to deliver on the title's promise.

Finally, *House Of Horrors* (1946) makes use of the acromegalic features of Rondo Hatton, as a sculptor manipulates his hulking “ Creeper ” into snapping the spines of art world enemies. The exploitation of Hatton's medical condition doesn't sit easily with contemporary viewers, though it's interesting to note that in sculpted form at least his features are described in terms of their “strength” and “beauty”. He's no actor though, and his lurking-behind-corners schtick soon wears thin.

The plotting is repetitive – director Jean Yarbrough sprinkles hotties throughout, as if fearful our interest may wane. But good work by Martin Kosleck as the vengeful artist and Virginia Grey as a sassy art critic ensure that the film intermittently sparks into life. **▶ Extras** All four come with new commentaries by expert pairings: Kevin Lyons and Jonathan Rigby on *Murders In The Zoo* and *Horror Island*; Stephen Jones and Kim Newman on *Night Monsters* and *House Of Horrors*.

These chaps clearly know Universal's output inside-out, and have done their homework too; Rigby's nitpicking about the date on an invitation seen in *Murders* is impressively pedantic! Plus: two trailers; galleries; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

**I**rene Harvey, who played a shrink in *Night Monster*, was the mother of Jack Jones, who sang *The Love Boat*'s theme tune.



## LIVING WITH CHUCKY

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 24 APRIL**

2022 | 15 | Blu-ray/download/VOD

▶ Director Kyra Elise Gardner

▶ Cast Don Mancini, Brad Dourif, Marlon Wayans, Lin Shaye

▶ **When M3GAN was still a twinkle in TikTok's lens, and way before Annabelle's creation, there was just one cinematic toy rampaging through movie theatres: the original, and best, Charles Lee Ray (Chucky for short).**

So it's appropriate that Chucky has joined the likes of Freddy and Jason with his own feature-length documentary. It's one with a difference, appropriate for a movie rooted in childhood trauma. Before the doc gets to that, however, it's a standard film-by-film exploration of the *Child's Play* franchise, talking to everyone you'd expect, including writer/director Don Mancini, the voice of Chucky Brad Dourif, and Andy actor Alex Vincent.

These interviews cover more than the movies – especially in the second half, which is where things really get interesting. Director Kyra Elise Gardner uses the format to confront her memories of growing up with Chucky's “dad”, special effects artist Tony Gardner, and how his work ethic affected her own childhood. It's so emotionally affecting that you wish there was more of it. That's a minor quibble, though: this is a fascinating and surprisingly moving piece of work.

▶ **Extras** Director's commentary; three lots of off-cuts from the same interview sessions (17 minutes); trailer. **Sam Ashurst**





## M3GAN Devil Doll

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

2023 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director Gerard Johnstone

▶ Cast Allison Williams, Violet McGraw, Ronny Chieng, Amie Donald

◆ **Move over Chucky; there's** another lvin', stalkin', creepin', chokin' livin' doll in town – and this one has some killer moves.

After her niece's parents die in a car accident, workaholic singleton Gemma (Allison Williams) takes in the nine-year-old, introducing her to her latest project: M3GAN, a child-sized robotic companion. Sadly, Gemma seems entirely unaware of Asimov's first law of robotics – bad news for anyone who crosses Cady, from a neighbour's dog to a bullying boy.

Though there are logic failures (it's implausible that a priceless prototype would be allowed out of

company HQ), Akela Cooper's script blends the kills with human drama and questions to chew over (at times functioning as an allegory for parenting-by-iPad). And M3GAN, who combines human actors, puppetry and animatronics, is an uncanny creation, whose *Dynasty*-level bitchiness proves deliciously campy.

The film is undeniably performing on the same dance mat as 2019's *Child's Play* reboot. Still, this new kid on the block executes similar plot beats with finesse.

◆ **Extras** Choose the theatrical version or an unrated cut that adds f-words and blood, but nothing that significant. Three all-too-brief featurettes (15 minutes) offer some welcome glimpses into how M3GAN was realised. **Ian Berriman**

i Director Gerard Johnstone looked to '50s screen idols like Audrey Hepburn and Grace Kelly for M3GAN's style of dress.



If looks could kill... M3GAN would use those too.



## SWALLOWED

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 24 APRIL

2022 | 18 | Download

◆ **As desperate money-**making schemes go, agreeing to smuggle packages of a mysterious narcotic over the US border has to be one of the more ill-advised. Especially when said drugs turn out to be horrifying nightmare maggots which have to be swallowed to get them past the authorities.

*The Ruins* director Carter Smith's latest combines skin-crawling body horror with sharp critique of the film industry's exploitation of young queer men. The finale is a little too understated, but this is still brain-searing stuff. **Sarah Dobbs**



## LOVERS LANE

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 24 APRIL

1999 | 15 | Blu-ray

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** *Scream* really should have killed off formulaic slashers like this, in which, 13 years after a couple were killed with a steel hook on Valentine's Day, a mental patient escapes to menace teens partying in the same spot.

It's as tame as it is generic – victims die off-screen, or with only a splash of fake blood to show for it – and the twist in the tail is pretty witless, leaving nostalgia for '90s fashions about the only reason to watch.

◆ **Extras** A choice of two aspect ratios; commentary; Making Of; trailer; gallery. **Ian Berriman**



## LAST SENTINEL

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 24 APRIL

2023 | TBC | Download

◆ **Waterworld** meets *Crimson Tide* in this so-so post-apocalyptic thriller, set in a world where sea levels have risen so high that only two warring continents remain.

Trapped on a remote monitoring platform, four soldiers debate about whether lack of contact with the outside world means it's time to detonate the nuke in their care. For all the heated conversation, however, there's precious little tension, humour or character development, while the final act is disappointingly anti-climactic. **Richard Edwards**



## FROM BLACK

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 28 APRIL

2023 | TBC | SVOD

**SHUDDER** The latest in a long line of grief-based horrors, *From Black* seems to be reaching for the impact of *Hereditary* but ends up feeling like a cheaper version of *The Other Side Of The Door*.

A former drug addict whose son disappeared seven years ago tries to explain to the police why she was performing a satanic ritual in her house.

There just aren't enough surprises to keep it interesting for viewers, though. Sludgy colour grading and a sullen atmosphere make this a very slow 110 minutes. **Sarah Dobbs**



## NAKED LUNCH

In the zone

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1991 | 18 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)

► Director David Cronenberg

► Cast Peter Weller, Judy Davis, Ian Holm, Julian Sands

❖ **How do you film an unfilmable novel?** William Burroughs's cult 1959 book is really just a series of vignettes. A faithful adaptation would also be banned all over the world (chapter nine would do it...).

David Cronenberg's solution: take elements from it plus earlier works like *Queer* and *Junkie*, then add aspects of the writer's life (like the day he shot his wife dead in a drunken game), and a noirish thriller throughline. The result: a Brundlegly fusion of the author and the director's sensibilities.

Thick with kink and deadpan black humour, the film drifts between reality and hallucination.

Peter Weller is author surrogate William Lee, who decamps to Interzone (an analogue of Burroughs hangout Tangier), recruited to infiltrate the drug trade. It's a shame that, due to the Gulf War, location filming in Morocco fell through – it all feels very stage-bound. Otherwise, there can be few complaints.

Weller, a Burroughs fan who lobbied for the role, plays Lee with laconic detachment, aceing some classic routines. Key innovations (like a giant bug/typewriter that speaks through a sphincter-like orifice) are imaginatively grotesque. And the score is stunning, wedding Howard Shore's orchestral compositions to Ornette Coleman's squalls of improvised saxophone, to suitably strung-out/dissolute effect.

❖ **Extras** A fascinating hour-long Weller interview sees the actor



"Don't worry, he's on the menthols these days."

speaking eloquently and with great passion about his admiration for Burroughs (and sharing a wild acid trip story). "Naked Making Lunch" (55 minutes, 1992), is a solid TV doc which includes on-set footage and interviews with the author and director. Of four more interviews (62 minutes), only effects guy Chris Walas's is of note. There's also an hour-long talking head on

Burroughs, a decent "visual essay" (28 minutes), and some score chat (31 minutes). An old Cronenberg commentary is rather sporadic, but informative enough to make a new critical track feel redundant. Plus: trailer; galleries; 80-page book; poster; postcards. **Ian Berriman**

**i** Cronenberg and Weller later gifted the cat-loving Burroughs a Korat kitten (a grey pedigree breed). He named it Boy.

## JEAN ROLLIN

Clocking in

► **RELEASED 24 APRIL**

1971/1997 | 18/15 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)

► Director Jean Rollin

► Cast Sandra Julien Jean-Marie

Durand, Alexandra Pic, Isabelle Teboul

❖ **Both these Indicator releases** have the late French director Jean Rollin's hallmarks: pairs of young women, vampires, cemeteries, freewheeling narratives, poetic dialogue, and what he'd have called a painterly use of nudity.

As psychedelic as it is gothic, **The Shiver Of The Vampires**

★★★★★ sees newly-weds visiting the castle of the bride's cousins, to find that these vampire hunters have now been turned. There are some memorably surreal images – a vampire emerging from inside a grandfather clock; death by nipple spikes; a coffin on fire – plus some eye-pleasing use of coloured gels, with a graveyard inexplicably

bathed in blood red. The icing on the cake is a deeply groovy score by psych band Acanthus.

**Two Orphan Vampires**

★★★★★ centres on Louise and Henriette – bloodsuckers who (for reasons never explained) are blind by day, but can see at night, and have apparently died and been reborn many times. The sight of the twentysomething leads in little-girl pigtails is somewhat squirm-inducing, the frequent day-for-night is laughably naff, and the film really would have benefited from a brisker edit.

❖ **Extras** An upgrade on Black House's vanilla 2018 Blu-ray, **Shiver** ★★★★★ features a useful Making Of (18 minutes) which interviews two crew, plus a critical appreciation (eight minutes). Rollin's heavily accented English makes a 2004 interview (41 minutes) hard-going; thankfully



"Do we shock you? Do you find us outrageous?"

his commentary is in (subtitled) French. There's also a second track by a Rollin blogger, plus 25 minutes of S&M/lesbianism inserts used to sauce up export prints, and a short Rollin intro.

On **Orphans** ★★★★★ four cast and crew contribute to a Making Of (42 minutes). There are 2002 interviews with both leads (24 minutes), plus footage of them

visiting a cemetery (four minutes). Archive Rollin footage sees him interviewed (in French, 35 minutes) and showing off his books (seven minutes). There's also a new critical commentary. Both releases come with trailers, galleries and 80-page books. **Ian Berriman**

**i** The weight of huge bat wings cracked three of *Orphans* PA/actor Véronique Djaouti's ribs – but she finished the scene!





## LINOLEUM

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | TBC | Download

▶ Director Colin West

▶ Cast Jim Gaffigan, Rhea Seehorn, Katelyn Nacon, Gabriel Rush

◆ **Midlife crises seem to be** catching in this melancholy SF head-scratcher. Cameron Edwin (Jim Gaffigan) is the host of children's science TV show *Above & Beyond*, but his life is falling apart.

He's about to be replaced by a more cynical host, Kent Armstrong (Gaffigan again), while his wife Erin (*Better Call Saul*'s Rhea Seehorn) is filing for divorce and struggling with her own thwarted ambitions. Then part of a space rocket falls out of the sky into their garden, and Cameron spirals into unhealthy obsession.

Colin West's film is a fascinating oddity, equal parts indie comedy and reality-bending drama. The homespun retro-futurist aesthetic of *Above & Beyond* – lab coats and tinfoil rockets – deliciously recalls US show *Bill Nye The Science Guy* and other educational programmes, but for the most part Cameron's life is grounded in suburban frustration.

It's all very *Donnie Darko*, from a partial high school setting to time-twisting elements, objects falling from the sky and even a silent, spooky old lady watching on from afar.

In its final act, however, the film takes a dramatic left turn, one that recontextualises everything we've seen so far. That choice will divide the audience, but it adds both meaning and emotional catharsis to the film's whimsy.

Will Salmon



## LAURIN

### Girl Afraid

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1989 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Robert Sigi

▶ Cast Dóra Szinetár, Brigitte Karner, Károly Eperjes, Hédi Temessy

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** This slice of arthouse gothic is an interesting curiosity: set in 19th century Germany but shot in Hungary, with its mostly Hungarian cast all speaking English (later redubbed), for the international market.

Dóra Szinetár plays young Laurin, whose mother dies after stumbling upon a child-killer dragging a boy in a bag. As a mystery, it's no great shakes: given their build, there's really only one man in the frame.

Being centred on a young girl, it's been bracketed with *Valerie And Her Week Of Wonders* and *The Company Of Wolves*, but isn't as fantastical. Barring luridly-lit, Bava-esque dream sequences and the recurring sinister presence of a black dog and a black kite (suggestive that the killer may be Death itself), it's a fairly straight coming-of-age tale.

Still, it's an atmospheric effort, full of wind machine-tossed leaves

and dry-ice mist, and the sad-eyed Szinetár (who admits she's always being asked, "What's wrong?") is a magnetically soulful lead.

◆ **Extras** The English and German dubs have differences, with the latter fingering a suspect for the death of a kitten. A vintage Making Of (10 minutes) and workprint trims (20 minutes) provide glimpses of the cast's accented English. Director Robert Sigi quizzes his grown-up child stars in two 2017 interviews (28 minutes); Szinetár has an amusing anecdote about failing to hear "Cut!" when running through the woods. Meanwhile DoP Nyika Jancsó (16 minutes) cites Hitchcock as an influence. Film writer Jonathan Rigby (33 minutes) provides very perceptive observations on some of the film's peculiar details.

You also get two Sigi shorts: 1983's "Der Weihnachtsbaum" (19 minutes), a baffling sub-Lynchian two-hander, and "Coronoia 21" (10 minutes), one of those lockdown exercises *nobody* wants to watch in 2023... Plus: trailer; booklet.

Ian Berriman

**i** The next year, Dóra Szinetár (then 13) had a best-selling pop album in Hungary. She's since made a successful career in musicals.

Her lava lamp was a glaring historical error.

## (ROUND UP)



Screeners were not made available for AA Milne-desecrating horror

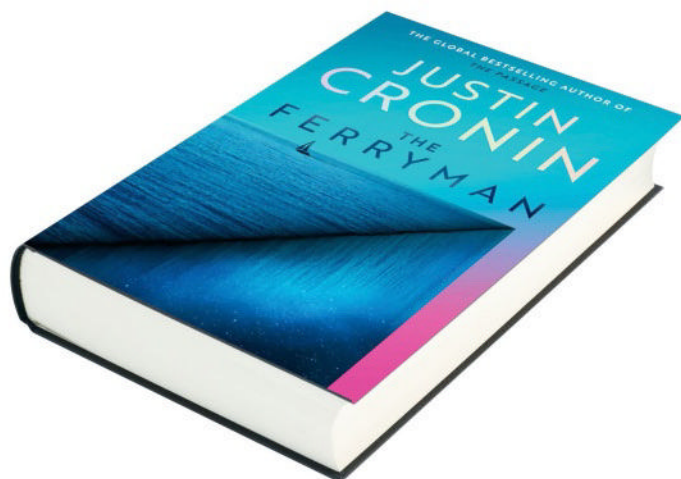
**WINNIE THE POOH: BLOOD AND HONEY** (Blu-ray/DVD/download), and we're not paying good money for it – it'd only encourage them. But we can spotlight critical raves by other publications, which include "too dim to be worthy of a curious look", "a gruelling slog" and "dreary slop".

The first of this month's two American Genre Film Archive releases is **THE SWORD AND THE CLAW** (22 April, Blu-ray), a daft historical romp from 1975. Cüneyt Arkin stars as a brawling warrior raised by lions. "It's Conan the Barbarian meets the Three Stooges" says the blurb – alas, it's more like a slow Turkish *Tarzan*, complete with a dub entirely delivered in the same flat tone of voice you might use to say, "Don't forget to put the bins out". Extras include a bonus movie: 1981 South Korean martial arts flick *Brawl Busters*. **THE AGFA HORROR TRAILER SHOW** (out now, Blu-ray)

intersperses scratchy, amusingly sleazy trailers for '60s to '80s titles like *Orgy Of The Living Dead*, *Massage Parlor Massacre* and *I Eat Your Skin* with ads for concession stand wares such as spicy meatball sandwich. Like you'd have any appetite after watching *The Corpse Grinders*. Bonuses include a 71-minute "mixtape" featuring even shabbier trailers for no-budget '90s fare. Finally, the latest TV box sets include

**CHAPELTHWAITE SEASON ONE** (1 May, Blu-ray/DVD) and **REGINALD THE VAMPIRE SEASON ONE** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD).





## THE FERRYMAN

No man is an island



RELEASED 2 MAY

560 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author Justin Cronin

Publisher Orion Books

### According to John Burn-

Murdoch, chief data reporter at the *Financial Times*, the UK and the USA are “poor societies with pockets of rich people”.

It's an insight that has brought a stark clarity to concerns over the society-wide effects of inequality. Not only do most of us prefer to live in more equal societies, but inequality causes its own problems, ranging from resentment among those struggling to get by to practical issues around attracting the migrant workers needed to carry out essential roles.

These kinds of issues were, you would guess, on Justin Cronin's mind when he sat down to write a follow-up to his monumental vampire trilogy *The Passage*. *The Ferryman* is set on the archipelago of Prospera, whose islands are idyllic for a pampered elite but far less fun for everyone else. Here is a society where – and Caribbean tax havens may have played in here – inequality has become ossified.

It's a world we see primarily from the perspective of the privileged Proctor Bennett, a ferryman with the Department of Social Contracts. His somewhat spooky job, one he finds deeply satisfying, is to prepare those heading for an island known as the Nursery. Here, they will have their memories wiped clean and their bodies spruced up, before being sent back to begin life afresh as the wards of people whom they once lived alongside.

But trouble is brewing. On the Annex, where those who act as the support staff to the privileged live, a group called the Arrivalists is plotting to overthrow the existing order. Can they succeed? Adding to the sense that something here is very wrong, Prospera is clearly a society that is cut off from the outside world. How and why has this happened? And why is Bennett dreaming, something that is supposed to be impossible on Prospera?

These questions come into focus when Bennett's own father asks his son to guide him through the retirement process. All seems to be going normally until his father suddenly appears to reject his fate – a source of professional

shame for Bennett. It's a prelude to Bennett beginning to question all that he thinks he knows.

At which point, a mild spoiler alert: the Bennett we first meet doesn't have a clue what's going on. Which in itself is not an unfamiliar plot device for anyone with an acquaintance with science fiction conventions. There's a twist here that you may see coming and, for some regular SF readers, you can even imagine this spoiling their enjoyment. A further slightly less mild spoiler: this is a book that riffs on one of the most famous Prospero quotes from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

And yet there's so much that's good here you'd need to be especially grumpy not to enjoy *The Ferryman*. Action scenes are brilliantly executed, and a sense of menace is never far from the surface in a book that operates in many key respects as a psychological thriller.

Most importantly, Cronin, as he proved with the *Passage* trilogy, is especially adept at balancing characterisation and plot. The bond between Bennett and a mysterious daughter-like figure,

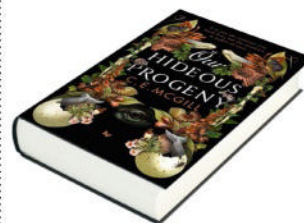
**“A sense of menace is never far from the surface”**

Caeli, is beautifully drawn, but also serves the story in that arguably it turns out to be the novel's key relationship.

To return to where we began, most of us don't want to live in unequal societies. In part, that's because most of us need to feel some kind of sense of common purpose with our fellow citizens. *The Ferryman* is ultimately a book with mysteries that can only be resolved by its protagonists (re-) establishing connections, understanding themselves in relation to others and living with that self-knowledge. Cronin's exploration of this theme proves to be rich and satisfying.

Jonathan Wright

**i** Mythology's most famous ferryman is Charon, the psychopomp who guides souls across the rivers Acheron and Styx.



## OUR HIDEOUS PROGENY



RELEASED 4 MAY

400 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author CE McGill

Publisher Penguin Books

Writing the sequel to a beloved old novel is a delicate proposition. It could be called superfluous at best, absolutely ridiculed and dismissed at worst. For their debut novel, CE McGill takes the challenge in their stride, writing a sequel to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Surprisingly, *Our Hideous Progeny* is neither middling nor audaciously bad. It's actually a real treat: a Victorian adventure novel cloaked in gothic imagery that dives into the museums and debate halls of London.

Our protagonist is Mary, the great-niece of Victor Frankenstein, whose own interest in science grows inside her like a blood curse until she discovers Victor's old diary entries, and the innocence of a girlhood passion ignites into obsession. It's a neat little twist – the idea of Frankenstein's dizzying hubris not ending with his death, but being passed down the generations until it finds a suitable host.

Sadly, like the stuffy academics Mary comes up against, it all feels too buttoned-up. *Frankenstein* was incredibly subversive for the time. *Our Hideous Progeny* doesn't feel half as bold, even given the twist of forbidden love Mary feels for her sister-in-law. It's a rollicking read, and suitably moody, but overshadowed by the feeling that a darker and more provocative sequel is still to be written. Kimberley Ballard





## ASCENSION

★★★★★

► RELEASED 27 APRIL

336 pages | Hardback/ebook/  
audiobook

► Author Nicholas Binger

► Publisher HarperVoyager

❖ When a mountain taller than Everest appears in the Pacific, a shadowy organisation gathers a bunch of misfit scientists and survivalists to scale the thing and find out what the dickens is going on.

It may sound like the plot for one of those Doug McClure Amicus movies of the '70s, but *Ascension* actually wants to be a Christopher Nolan film. The book mixes in some religious philosophising, a tragic personal arc for one of the scientists, and a whole load of multidimensional and temporal shenanigans (there's liberal use of the word "tesseract") to create a rum old head-scratcher of a science thriller.

It's written in an epistolary format, in the literary equivalent of "found footage" (rediscovered letters), which becomes quite distracting at times as you wonder quite when the guy finds time to write these things. It also turns out to be far less mind-blowing than the faux academic introduction promises.

But *Ascension* is certainly a compelling read, helped by a cast of delightfully quirky characters and lively prose that paints some vivid, memorable imagery. It's just a shame most of the big revelations feel like familiar sci-fi hand-me-downs, and occasionally the twists are just downright corny.

Ultimately it feels like one of Jules Verne's *Voyages extraordinaires* given a modish spit and polish. **Dave Golder**



## THE GHOST THEATRE

### London Calling

★★★★★

► RELEASED 11 MAY

320 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Mat Osman

► Publisher Bloomsbury Publishing

❖ London is unforgiving – it eats people up. Yet it's also magnificent, and a place that has always drawn those who need to make themselves anew. Those such as Shay, a messenger girl, hawk whisperer and fortune teller, who belongs to a religious sect that worships birds. Or Nonesuch, a child theatre actor, a Blackfriars boy, with the rare gift to hold audiences rapt.

In a more egalitarian era, both would be feted and rich, but the setting of Mat Osman's second novel is late-Elizabethan London, which regards Shay and Nonesuch as little better than guttersnipes. Both are preyed upon, both are victims – though neither would describe themselves as such.

How to fight back? The solution that Shay and Nonesuch, accidental friends, hit upon is the Ghost Theatre of the novel's title.

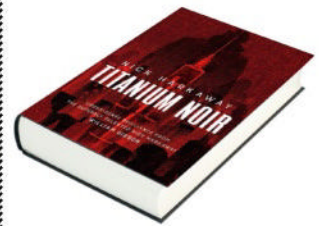
“The duo form a guerrilla performance troupe”

Rather than work solely for Nonesuch's unsavoury boss Evans, a man who pimps his actors, the duo form a guerrilla performance troupe that attracts both a young audience and the unwelcome attentions of the authorities and even the Queen herself, suspicious of the subversive possibilities inherent in lowlives making their own fun.

Those in power are right to be worried, because while Shay and Nonesuch lack status, they have imagination. The day-to-day world, in Nonesuch's estimation, is “arbitrary”, whereas things “make sense” on stage. The tensions and contradictions inherent in this idea drive the plot of *The Ghost Theatre*, a slipstream historical novel, towards a brilliantly scripted set-piece finale that plays out as a kind of fever dream.

As he works his way towards this denouement – and at times that progress could be better paced – Osman gradually broadens the novel from an initial focus on his protagonists, showing us both London and (far more dangerous) provincial England. It is, of course, a place from which every dreamer trying to remake themselves has to run. **Jonathan Wright**

**i** Osman will be doing signings for the book, including at Blackwells in Manchester (9 May) and Topping & Co in Bath (15 May).



## TITANIUM NOIR

★★★★★

► RELEASED 4 MAY

240 pages | Hardback/ebook/  
audiobook

► Author Nick Harkaway

► Publisher Corsair

❖ The future is a dark and unknowable city, where the price of a life is no longer a metaphorical question. Welcome to *Titanium Noir*, an adrenalised hardboiled crime pastiche that kicks off with the murder of a Titan.

Titans are huge, genetically modified superhumans who are also normally super-rich, as it costs a pretty penny to get the procedure done. They can have it done repeatedly – growing larger each time – to avoid death. Being shot in the head remains terminal, though. Enter uncompromising PI Cal Sounders, who specialises in Titan cases. But this case is different, opening up enough cans of worms to make blackbird obesity an environmental threat.

*Titanium Noir* is a bullet-paced thriller that's darkly witty rather than a Jasper Fforde-style comedy crime romp; think *Blade Runner* in the style of *Sin City*. It's an engrossing mystery, packed with rich and intriguing world-building detail. There's also a memorable Titan crime boss, whose description on the page is brilliantly bizarre.

The plot is over-reliant on lucky guesses and convenient coincidences, and there's a big lightbulb moment that could have happened at any time, making the book much shorter. But such niggles are swept aside by its sheer manic energy and delight in supercharging noir clichés. **Dave Golder**



## THE ART AND MAKING OF DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: HONOUR AMONG THIEVES

Dungeons mastered



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

208 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Eleni Roussos

► Publisher Del Rey

One of the best things about the new *Dungeons & Dragons* movie is the way it wholeheartedly embraces its tabletop roots. This comprehensive Making Of follows a similar ethos, showing how locations, monsters and character classes from the veteran RPG were given a big-screen makeover. You get all the usual “Everyone is

amazing!” interviews you’d normally associate with a licensed tie-in, of course, but this book will also enhance your enjoyment and understanding of the film. Every major character’s origin is linked back to the game, for example, while there are handy lists of the spells each magic-wielder uses on screen.

It’s even more in its element when discussing Faerûn’s non-human residents, whether it’s Legacy Effects creating an animatronic bird person, or the challenges inherent in turning a

giant block of jelly into a credible threat. Illustrations of the *D&D* creatures that didn’t make the cut provide an intriguing glimpse of a movie that could have been.

It’s packed with on-set photography, concept art and references to the game; fans should relish the attention to detail. And if *Honour Among Thieves* is your first experience of *D&D*, this could be your next step into a larger world. **Richard Edwards**

**i** The ruins of Dolblunde were inspired by Northern Ireland’s Giant’s Causeway and Fingal’s Cave in the Hebrides.

Concept art for the Emerald Tavern.



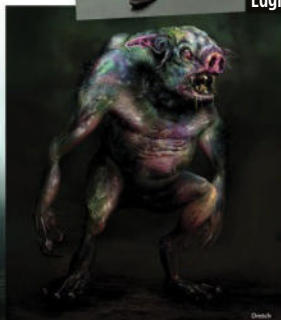
Costume designs for Edgin Darvis.



Eye eye, it’s a Beholder. Run!



Gray Render



Dretch



Gray Render, Dretch and Troglodyte.

## BULLET TIME A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS



## STAR WARS: TIMELINES

► **RELEASED 27 APRIL**

344 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Authors Various

► Publisher Dorling Kindersley

- Traces *Star Wars* history from the origins of the Jedi to the end of *The Rise Of Skywalker*.
- Links canonical events from movies, TV shows, books and comics.
- Really comes into its own as a reference book for the bits between the films, especially if you’re not up to date with *The High Republic* or other expanded universes.
- The main illustrated timeline is punctuated by spreads devoted to pivotal people, institutions or spaceships.
- Births and deaths of major characters – and plenty more you’ve never heard of – are recorded in sidebars.
- Entries are entirely “in-universe”, so they don’t tell you where you can watch or read each event taking place.
- There’s nothing from *Andor* or the latest season of *The Mandalorian*.







## THE CLEAVING

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

368 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Juliet E McKenna

► Publisher Angry Robot

❖ **One of the joys of classical legends** is the way they're constantly retold, each new work reflecting the time of telling. In recent years there's been a trend of focusing on the untold tales of the women involved – Briseis's experience of the Trojan war, or Ariadne's of the Minotaur, for example. *The Cleaving* continues this, telling the story of Arthur and Camelot through the roles of Nimue, Ygraine, Morgana and Guinevere.

It's Nimue's tale, though, as this woman of the Hidden Folk, continually reinventing herself to hide her great age, stands at the side of the women she cares for, trying to not interfere in human history but constantly thwarted as she tries to protect those she loves. As Merlin uses his powers to manipulate human history and bring Arthur to power, Nimue sees the human toll and is forced to use her own magic to stand against him.

It's powerful stuff, with constant reminders that every merry tale of a slain knight also involves a devastated family left behind. *The Cleaving* does have its flaws – the male characters never feel as well-drawn as the female ones, and though sympathy is felt towards the servants and peasants, they never become characters in their own right. The ending also feels rushed and too neat. But these are small quibbles – this is a fascinating take on a story we all feel we know, and a gripping read. **Rhian Drinkwater**



## IN THE LIVES OF PUPPETS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 25 APRIL**

432 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author TJ Klune

► Publisher Tor Books

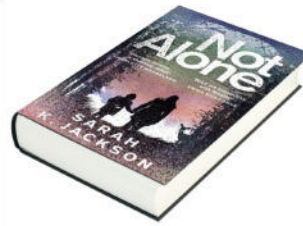
❖ **You'll look at your robot vacuum differently** after reading this. *In The Lives Of Puppets* is a post-apocalyptic take on *The Adventures Of Pinocchio*, in which the world is run by androids, and there's only one real boy left... depending, of course, on your definition of "real".

Victor has spent most of his life living in a treehouse with three robots: his adopted android father, a wonky nurse droid, and an adorably enthusiastic little vacuum cleaner. While scavenging in a junkyard, he discovers a mostly whole android who can't remember his purpose in life, and decides to make friends – with pretty disastrous results.

The *Pinocchio* parallels are pretty oblique, but they're not necessary to understanding the story. If you don't know why the bad guys use Cat and Fox symbols, you won't miss much. If anything, this story feels much more like *The Wizard Of Oz*, with Victor's companions mapping pretty easily onto Dorothy's, and there's an obvious dash of *Frankenstein*.

Literary allusions aside, this is a compelling and heart-warming adventure: the worldbuilding feels solid, the existential threat is suitably intense, and if you're the kind of person who gets feelings about cute robots, the ending is almost unbearably poignant.

**Sarah Dobbs**



## NOT ALONE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

432 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Sarah K Jackson

► Publisher Picador

❖ **Recent figures from the** 5 Gyres Institute show there are 170 trillion tonnes of plastic particles polluting our oceans. Debut author Sarah K Jackson, an ecologist, uses *Not Alone* to examine one possibility: these particles being swept up by a hurricane that poisons every creature on Earth.

Jackson meticulously details what day-to-day survival would be like for anyone not felled in this toxic storm; protagonist Katie's problems are compounded by the fact that she has a young son to look after, too. We join them five years after the storm in their decaying flat in Hitchin, just as they're forced to journey across a ravaged Britain.

Yes, it's another story about a lone carer trying to keep a child alive against impossible odds – recent examples include *The Mandalorian* and *The Last Of Us*, or even, in a non-sci-fi vein, *Room* (whose author provides a cover quote). To its credit, *Not Alone* nails its post-apocalyptic world and knows how to manipulate our tension levels. Unfortunately it's also let down by pace-slowness flashbacks to earlier moments in Katie's life, unconvincing secondary characters and its unrelenting gruelling misery.

The book's main lessons, however, are inarguable: that motherhood is hard... and we really need to ensure that our own progeny don't have to go through this shit themselves.

**Jayne Nelson**

## REISSUES

Pick of the paperbacks:  
**DAUGHTER OF THE MOON GODDESS**

(★★★★★, 27 April, HarperVoyager), the first book of Sue Lynn Tan's Celestial Kingdom duology. It draws on Chinese mythology for the setting and characters; heroine Xingyin's mother is Chang'e, a mortal who became the Moon Goddess and was imprisoned after consuming an elixir intended for her heroic husband. We said: "Tan gives depth to the Celestial Kingdom and its immortal inhabitants. Rather than show off her worldbuilding, she introduces only what is necessary." **Shauna Lawless's THE CHILDREN OF GODS AND FIGHTING MEN** (★★★★★, 11 May, Head Of Zeus)



interweaves mythology with the 10th century wars in Ireland. One of its female leads is a Fomorion, an immortal race who can perform fire-magic; another is one of the Tuatha Dé Danann, who have the gift of healing. We said: "Vibrant characters and skilful storytelling... Lawless has her own voice and the Irish setting lends the book a distinct flavour." Finally, musician Janelle Monáe's name is on the cover of **THE MEMORY LIBRARIAN** (★★★★★, 27 April, HarperVoyager), although she had several collaborators. This anthology expands the myths of her dystopian-themed 2018 album *Dirty Computer*. We said: "The specifics are imaginative and immersive: vandalised memory recollection boxes, mutants with the power to sniff emotional residues..."







## DRAGONFALL

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 2 MAY**

429 pages | Hardback/ebook/  
audiobook

► Author LR Lam

► Publisher Hodderscape

❖ **If you know of a prophecy** concerning you, and act upon that knowledge, will your actions fulfil the prophecy or defy it? And if someone was prophesied to save their people, could they ever make the right choice with that weight resting upon them?

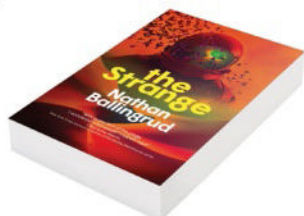
Everen is the sole male dragon in Vere Celene, struggling to cope with the responsibility of prophecy. Dragged by magic through the Veil to the country of Loc, he finds himself part-bonded with Arcady, a young thief whose magical attempts to escape their past seem to have pulled him through.

Not realising just what Everen – trapped in a human-like form – truly is, Arcady hopes that he can help with their dreams of a job big enough to secure their future. Meanwhile, Everen sees in them the possibility of finally saving his people.

One interesting highlight of Loc is its approach to gender: there are no restrictions on gender roles, and everyone is defined as “their” unless they choose to tell you otherwise.

Unfortunately the story itself – the first in a trilogy – is something of a slog. The slow-burn of characters converging on a mutual prize heats up as the heist approaches, but getting there takes far too long. Some satisfying twists promise better in the future, though.

Rhian Drinkwater



## THE STRANGE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

320 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Nathan Ballingrud

► Publisher Titan Books

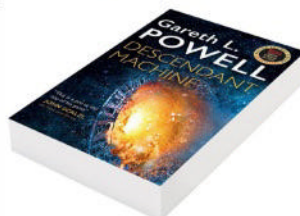
❖ **Elon Musk would probably** rethink his dreams of going to Mars if he read *The Strange*. Half frontier myth, half science fiction nightmare, it portrays life on Mars as exhausting, lawless, and occasionally downright horrifying.

Fourteen-year-old Annabelle Crisp works at a diner in the New Galveston settlement. Times are hard and getting harder, so when a gang of creepy miners from the nearby Dig Town rob the diner, taking with them her last gift from her mother, she's determined to get revenge. Unfortunately, it turns out there's a lot more at stake than just stolen property.

Anyone looking for hard sci-fi will be disappointed by the lack of actual science in this novel, but it's got enough truly original grotesquery to delight horror fans. You get monsters of every flavour in this story: human ones, yep, but also mechanical ones and even supernatural, *strange* ones.

Even Annabelle herself is kind of a monster, a hard-headed product of her environment with very little empathy for anyone around her. Still, her quest is compelling, even if she's hard to like. It's annoying, then, that the ending is so unsatisfying.

Ballingrud swerves the obvious conclusion, but what we get instead almost feels like it ends mid-sentence, with far too many questions left unanswered. Still, it'll stop you wanting to sign up for Space X missions. **Sarah Dobbs**



## DESCENDANT MACHINE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

336 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Gareth L Powell

► Publisher Titan Books

❖ **It's always fascinating** seeing how traditional, nuts-and-bolts space opera adapts itself to changing times, and Gareth L Powell has come up with a distinctive example of this in his Continuum series, which hits its second volume in *Descendant Machine*.

Over a century after almost wrecking the Earth, humanity is still living in forced exile among the many massive ark ships of the Continuum fleet, but problems arrive when an alien race finds a way to potentially activate a massive, planet-sized ancient artefact. Soon a Continuum navigator and her intelligent scout ship find themselves in a race to reach a holy man who knows the true secret of the artefact, as an apocalyptic threat looms.

Powell's story deals with resonant themes like environmental disaster and future generations having to reckon with the choices of their predecessors. However, at heart it's a pulpy page-turner that wears its influences proudly, from *The Expanse*-style gritty action sequences to the Iain M Banks-esque spaceship names.

While there may not be any narrative surprises, *Descendant Machine* is smoothly paced, engagingly crafted and crammed full of a sense of wonder at the sheer scale of the universe. Whatever Powell has planned next, on this evidence it'll be well worth paying attention to. **Saxon Bullock**

## ALSO OUT

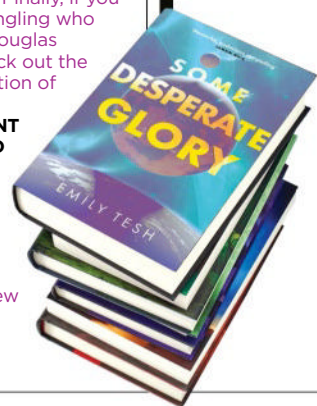
Plenty more books we couldn't fit in. Emily Tesh's space opera **SOME**

**DESPERATE GLORY** (out now, Orbit) centres on Kyr, one of the last human survivors – raised on a space station, and one of the best warriors of her generation. Assigned to the nursery to bear children, she decides instead to take revenge for Earth's destruction into her own hands. There's a war between the gods raging in Rebecca Ross's **DIVINE RIVALS** (out now, HarperVoyager), but

romance takes centre stage. Facilitated by a magical typewriter, it develops between Iris, a journalist who takes a job on the front line hoping to find her missing brother, and her rival at the paper. Set in an Old West with a fantasy twist, James Kinsley's **GREYSKIN** (27 April, Deixis Press) is a collection of interconnected short stories featuring

characters like a widowed farmer, a small-town lawman, and an Orc wanderer whose people are being swept aside by human settlers of the frontier. Continuing series include Sylvain Neuvel's space-race alt-history *Take Them To The Stars*, with closing chapter **FOR THE FIRST TIME, AGAIN** (27 April, Penguin); Anthony Ryan's epic fantasy *The Covenant Of Steel*, with second entry **THE MARTYR** (out now, Orbit); and Andrea Stewart's *The Drowning Empire* trilogy, which concludes with **THE BONE SHARD WAR** (out now, Orbit). Finally, if you know a youngling who might dig Douglas Adams, check out the new gift edition of

**THE RESTAURANT AT THE END OF THE UNIVERSE** (out now, Macmillan) which features delightful new illustrations by Chris Riddell.







# Justin Cronin

**The man behind the Passage Trilogy tells us about his process**



JULIE SOBER

## What is your daily writing routine like?

► I'm a midday writer – my best hours are 9.00–3.00, sometimes a little longer. When I'm heading toward the end of a book, I'll sometimes do a second shift after dinner. One thing I can say: I've finished every book I've ever written at 2.00 in the morning. I have no idea why this happens, but it always does. Two am, right on the money.

## Describe the room in which you typically write.

► I live in two places, so I have two offices. One is the third floor of an old house in Massachusetts, not far from the ocean. It's not especially large, but big enough for a couple of desks and a small couch, and there's a wall of windows facing south, so there's plenty of natural light.

My other office, in Houston, is considerably less charming – a tiny, dark bedroom with a view of an alleyway behind an apartment building.

## Do you find it helpful to listen to music while writing?

► Not usually, but once in a while, I'll find a song – always something instrumental – that seems to deepen my sense of a particular moment in a book, and I'll listen to it on repeat while I'm trying to think through the scene. But when

I actually do the writing, I do it in silence.

## How do you deal with writers' block/the urge to procrastinate?

► I just go with it. These things pass. If the writing's stalled, I do something else for a bit, usually exercise – swimming, biking, running.

## Which of your books was the most difficult to write?

► I'd say *The Ferryman* was the most challenging in the day-to-day. It was a different kind of book for me, structurally speaking – a recursive plot with a big twist about two-thirds of the way through. It took me a lot of time to figure out how to do this and correctly align all the details of the story.

## Were you a keen reader as a child?

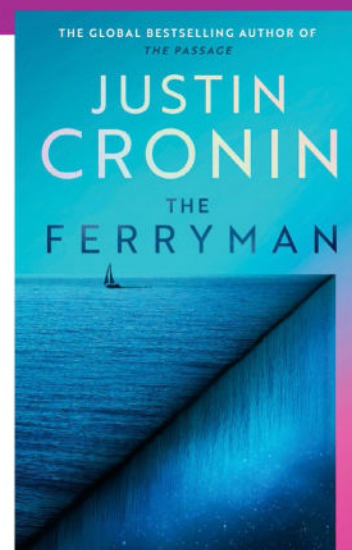
► Like every writer I know, I spent a lot of my childhood with my

**“When my language tanks feel empty, I often go and re-read Ian McEwan”**

nose in a book, and nearly all of this was the science fiction of the era, by which I mean the '70s. Robert Heinlein, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C Clarke, Isaac Asimov – I worked my way through the whole buffet of Golden Age greatness, appetisers to dessert.

## Is there any particular author whose writing ability makes you envious?

► When my language tanks feel empty, I often go back and re-read Ian McEwan. He writes some of the best sentences I know, and his work reminds me of the infinite possibilities of languages, all those



good sentences out there still waiting to be written.

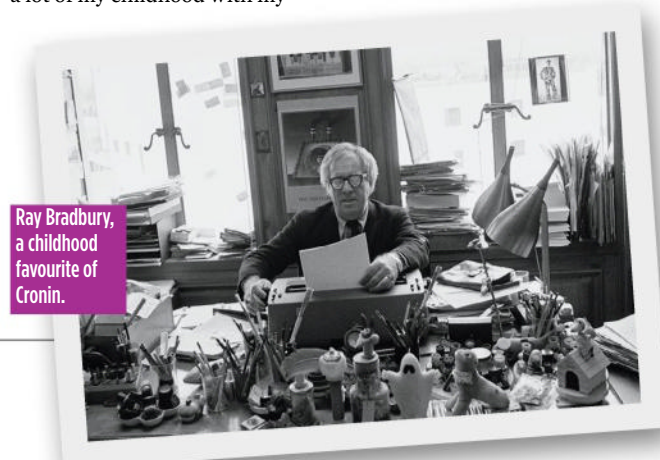
## Where's the oddest place you've seen one of your books, either personally or otherwise?

► A friend sent me a photo of *The Passage* on a shelf in the lobby of a hotel in Cairo. My books are definitely better-travelled than I am!

## What's the best piece of writing advice you've received or read?

► The first rule of writing is the first rule of any job: you must show up. ●

*The Ferryman is out on 2 May, published by Orion Fiction.*





## SINS OF SINISTER

Future imperfect



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Marvel

► Writers Kieron Gillen, Al Ewing,

Simon Spurrier

► Artists Various

**EVENT SERIES** Event comics don't have to be smart. Some of the most fun superhero events over the years have shamelessly embraced mind-blowing spectacle – but it helps a lot when interesting concepts lurk at the heart of the blockbuster mayhem.

The *X-Men* franchise has done well at this since Jonathan Hickman's *House Of X/Powers Of X* event in 2019, and this latest example proves again how the current "Krakoan Era" is in no danger of running out of steam.

An 11-issue event that runs across a trio of three-issue miniseries (bookended by two special issues), *Sins Of Sinister* focuses on flamboyant asshole supervillain Mister Sinister, and the consequences of his plan to take over the ruling Quiet Council of Krakoa.

Sinister has an ace up his sleeve – a collection of clones of mutant Moira MacTaggart, which give him the ability to reboot the timeline whenever his plans go wrong. As a result, he successfully infects first the Quiet Council and then all of mutantkind with his own devious personality, sparking off a new, exceptionally twisted future.

It's basically the "villain causes a dark alternate reality" concept that's been seen plenty of times

before. However, *Sins Of Sinister* pushes the story's scale to jaw-dropping intergalactic levels, while exploring some of the lurid SF concepts that have been hanging around since *House Of X*, especially the terrifying Dominion.

The event also borrows a structural trick from *Powers Of X*, with each consecutive issue of the three-part stories (*Storm & The Brotherhood Of Mutants*, *Nightcrawlers* and *Immoral X-Men*) depicting events in this nightmarish timeline 10, 100 and finally 1,000 years into the future.

At time of writing we're two-thirds of the way through the event (with four issues to go), and writers Kieron Gillen, Al Ewing and Simon Spurrier are pulling off spectacular action and gleeful plot



**“Pushes the story's scale to jaw-dropping intergalactic levels”**

twists, but also keeping the story satisfying and coherent.

Admittedly, they don't entirely avoid event-comic pitfalls – the plot occasionally feels overstuffed, there's not much room for quiet character moments, and anyone without a half-decent knowledge of current *X-Men* continuity is going to be utterly lost.

But for those willing to take it on, this is a thrilling and unpredictable ride that's backed up by splashy and energetic visuals from a wide selection of artists. Brainy and bonkers, *Sins Of Sinister* sets a standard of inventiveness and creativity that more superhero event comics should be aspiring to.

**Saxon Bullock**

**i** Marvel's next massive X-Men-related crossover event will be *Fall Of X*, which is due to kick off in July.



## THE BEST OF JANE BOND



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Rebellion

► Writer Unknown

► Artist Mike Hubbard

**COLLECTION** “Jane Bond”: it's a tired piece of tabloid wordplay, trotted out whenever Ian Fleming's superspy is tipped for a gender-flipping makeover on the big screen.

But long before dodgy Photoshops of Gillian Anderson wielding a Walther PPK there actually was a Jane Bond, a copyright-baiting adventuress whose exploits appeared in the pages of girls' weekly *Tina* in the late-'60s.

Returned to us in this entertaining reprint collection, Jane is unmistakably of her time, riding the spy boom initiated by the Bond films to claim a place in an empowered sisterhood alongside Emma Peel, Modesty Blaise and the Girl from UNCLE.

Naturally she's armed with a groovy line in gadgetry, from handbag parachutes to smoke-bomb compacts. Unlike 007 her peccadilloes go unexplored; there's no time for a Bond boy as she takes on giant robot lobsters and dastardly plots to melt the polar ice caps.

Artist Mike Hubbard was a veteran of the *Jane* newspaper strip and brings a similar blend of glamour and dynamism to these globe-trotting scrapes. A cosmopolitan figure equally at home in high fashion and high peril, this Jane proves every bit as cool and resourceful as her male counterpart. “Risks are part of my job,” she states, aiming squarely at the glass ceiling. **Nick Setchfield**





## DEAD BOY DETECTIVES

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Black Label/DC Comics

► Writer Pornsak Pichetshote

► Artists Jeff Stokely,  
Javier Rodriguez

**ISSUES 1-4** A six-parter, this *Sandman Universe* title takes supernatural sleuths Charles Rowland and Edmund Paine out of their element in more ways than one. Fetching up in Los Angeles, they encounter three Thai spectres.

Having died in the '70s, '80s and '90s, and comprising a snake ghost, a hollow-backed ghost and a Nak Mother Ghost, Melvin, Jai and Tanya have more interesting abilities than the English duo. They're looked after by Dom, a human mentor, but just like the girl eviscerated in the opening scene, he's dispatched by the feral Thai spirits menacing the city.

Drawing on his own Thai-American background, writer Pornsak Pichetshote makes some salient points about being Asian-American, with Dom remarking that, "Whenever people talk about anything Thai, it's mostly food. Never the people." Four issues in, the plot proceeds at a leisurely pace at first before eventually coming together as Charles and Edmund both develop feelings for Tanya.

Mixing endearing cartooning with visceral violence, the impressive art of Jeff Stokely (#1-3) and Javier Rodriguez (#4) is further enhanced by Miquel Muerto's subtle colours. It all makes for a comic that takes not just the characters but also the reader out of their comfort zone. **Stephen Jewell**



Anyone up for a bit of Iron Man on Iron Man action?

## THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

Rock bottom

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Marvel Comics

► Writer Gerry Duggan

► Artist Juan Frigeri

**ISSUES 1-4** It's relaunch time for Tony Stark, and Marvel are looking to the upcoming 60th anniversary of Iron Man's first appearance by putting the character through the wringer, while also embracing his complex and varied past.

The main concept here is similar to *Iron Man 3*, forcing Tony to go back to basics as various life issues finally catch up with him, leaving him almost penniless. To add to his troubles, there's also a mystery villain after both him and his closest allies, and they've got the ownership of Tony's old company – and all his dangerous tech – in their sights...

Writer Gerry Duggan intersperses this intrigue with the narrative concept of Tony trying to write his autobiography, which gives a fun spin to the story's

narration. It also means plenty of flashbacks to Tony's past, showcasing different eras of Iron Man's history (along with a few unwise Tony Stark hairstyles).

These first four issues feature some well-executed action sequences, and also show that Duggan has a good handle on the character. True, the portrayal here owes a king-sized debt to Robert Downey Jr, but Duggan does also find some new wrinkles to explore in Tony's psychology.

Unfortunately, the storytelling itself never quite catches fire, with the plot stuck way too long in set-up mode, while Juan Frigeri's art is muscular and eye-catching but lacks any truly iconic, breathtaking moments.

Duggan's approach may eventually pay off, but so far this is a decently average superhero adventure that hasn't yet shifted into being truly essential.

**Saxon Bullock**

**i** One of Duggan's biggest influences on his new *Iron Man* run is Frank Miller's classic 1986 *Daredevil* story "Born Again".



## NEMESIS RELOADED

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Image Comics/  
Millarworld

► Writer Mark Millar

► Artist Jorge Jiménez

**ISSUES 1-3** You could never accuse Mark Millar of underplaying a scene, and this return of his murderous anti-hero is about as OTT as the *Kick-Ass* creator gets.

This sequel to 2010's *Nemesis* (pitched as "What if Batman was the Joker?") delves into the erstwhile Matthew Anderson's backstory, drawing not only on the Caped Crusader's formative days but also Daredevil's.

Flashing back to his childhood as the son of a pair of junkies who were executed for the deaths of nine hitchhikers by LA's now-mayor and chief of police, it sees *Nemesis* inducted into the ranks of a secret society, who drop some intriguing revelations about a forgotten President in-between Carter and Reagan.

With the emphasis firmly on *Nemesis*'s present-day vendetta against his old adversaries, the relentless pace and constant, increasingly elaborate violence wear thin after a bit. Millar prides himself on recruiting the very best artists, and excelled himself with *Batman*'s Jorge Jiménez. He combines dynamic layouts with some explosively choreographed action, which suits the garish tone better than original artist Steve McNiven.

With issue three ending with a jet crashing into the National Guard, you have to wonder where Millar can go next, but we trust he will do so with his usual bombast. **Stephen Jewell**



## RESIDENT EVIL 4

### The pain in Spain

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Capcom**

► Reviewed on **PlayStation 5**

► Also available on **PlayStation 4, Xbox Series S/X, PC**

**VIDEOGAME** It's out with the Romero-esque zombie outbreak of *Resident Evil 2*'s Raccoon City, and in with something a little more *Wicker Man* for *Resident Evil 4*, Capcom's latest lavish remake.

Hero Leon Kennedy returns to rescue Ashley Graham, the kidnapped daughter of the US President, from a Spanish settlement deep in the woods. It doesn't take long to get a rather unpleasant welcome from the locals, thanks to the Las Plagas parasite that's been used to infect almost everyone in the region.

Those villagers, Los Ganados, are the initial threat, and feel

much smarter than their 2005 equivalents; they attack in bigger groups, meaning that Leon's new suite of action hero moves don't make him feel overpowered – the bombast of the flesh-tearing encounters is simply dialled up to match.

Expect the likes of axes to be thrown your way, pitchforks aiming for impalement, and chainsaw-revving from one hulking Ganado in particular. And that's all within the first 15 minutes – things only escalate from there, with new enemies over every hill (and often from within the twitching bodies of those you've dispatched, unless you double-tap them in time).

A more nuanced detection system means Leon can better position himself before fights break out, including knifing a few

foes from the shadows. His trusty blade is now as much a part of his core arsenal as the pistols, shotguns and rifles he crams into his limited-slot briefcase, allowing you to not only stab your

way out of deadly grabs, but also deflect attacks with a well-timed parry.

There's a constant push and pull with these large groups of enemies as you use your dwindling

resources – both ammo and knife durability require careful management – to control the fray. Naturally, later enemies have their own tricks you'll need to suss out, many of which make use of the fidelity of newer hardware – from those that use realistic camouflage to ambush you to noise-sensitive baddies in rooms with plenty of objects to accidentally jangle.

Not only does this remake respect the thrills of the original but, like its parasitic antagonists, it has evolved them. Action-horror doesn't get much better than this.

**Oscar Taylor-Kent**

**i** While healing items are limited, startled chickens drop eggs that Leon can, in a pinch, munch for a quick boost.



## SIMON PERKINS' LURGY

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 25 APRIL**

57 minutes | CD/download

► Publisher **Mulgrave Audio**

**AUDIO DRAMA** It's 1974, and 15-year-old Simon Perkins is at his granny's house, laid up after being struck down by an unspecified illness. His friends don't visit and his parents don't seem to give a toss. "I find real life disappointing and annoying," he grumbles at one point. "It's just not as good as it looks on the telly."

It's not just any TV that is comforting Simon at this time, it's the Open University. For those too fresh of face to remember: the BBC used to regularly screen programmes for OU students in the '70s and '80s, with desert-dry titles like *Man's Religious Quest* and *Engineering Mechanics*. Drifting in and out of sleep on his nan's settee, Simon begins to imagine – or maybe not imagine – conversations with the continuity announcer (played by the Radiophonic Workshop's Roger Limb – himself previously a BBC announcer), a voice that ends up tempting him into another world.

*Simon Perkins' Lurgy* is the first release for Mulgrave Audio, a company set up, its founders say, to "create stories firmly rooted in the everyday, but with a distinct sense of the uncanny". Writer Bob Fischer's two-hander is a reminder of how powerful and cherished even the most disposable of television was in a pre-internet age. Haunting, poignant and brimming with nostalgia, it's one to listen to with the lights off. **Steve O'Brien**



"Erm... dos cervezas, por favor? Oh sod it."







No, the series is not about the US President.

## JOE 90 BIG RAT beats



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► 74 minutes | CD/download

► Label Silva Screen

**SOUNDTRACK** Never enjoying the cross-generational impact of *Thunderbirds*, denied the kind of shiny CG reboot given to *Captain Scarlet*, not even as cherishably obscure as *The Secret Service*, *Joe 90* has quietly slipped from pop culture to become one of Gerry and Sylvia Anderson's least celebrated offerings.

This welcome release of Barry Gray's original score reminds us of one crucial fact: it was blessed with an absolute banger of a theme tune. An exhilarating blend of twanging surf guitar and burbling electronics, powered as much by the fashionable cool of '60s spy-fi as the optimism of the rocket age, it sounds like Stereolab partying

with Dick Dale in Earth orbit. It may, in fact, be the single grooviest thing in the history of human civilisation. Apparently it's a certified floor-filler in Northern Soul clubs.

Gray was obviously intoxicated by it too. Many of these 24 tracks – curated by Fanderson, the official appreciation society – find him gleefully reprising the title theme. "A Dream Come True" offers an even more soaring take, while "Boy With A Suitcase" adds a percussive swagger before twisting that killer riff still further.

Elsewhere there are echoes of Gray's other work for the Andersons: "Trapped In The Sky" could almost be an alternate version of the *Thunderbirds* theme.

**Nick Setchfield**

**i** Vic Flick, who played the guitar in the main theme, was also the lead guitarist on the James Bond theme in *Dr No*.

## RANI TAKES ON THE WORLD: BEYOND BANNERMAN ROAD

School's out forever



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► 187 minutes | CD/download

► Publisher Big Finish

**AUDIO DRAMA** Elisabeth Sladen's death in 2011 spelled an early end for spin-off series *The Sarah Jane Adventures*. Since then, her young co-stars have grown up. Here Anjali Mohindra returns as Rani, now a journalist still grieving the loss of her mentor.

Joseph Lidster's set-opener "Here Today" opens with Rani and Clyde (Daniel Anthony) reuniting

in a London bar. Life updates quickly give way to UNIT soldiers and flying saucers. Killed in an explosion, they find themselves back in the bar with their friends – then it happens again, and again. The repeats go on long enough to start to grate, but by the end the time loop is tied up neatly in a touching romance with hints of *The Man Who Fell To Earth*.

James Goss's "Destination: Wedding" sees Rani and her mother Gita (Mina Anwar) travel to a private island for the celebrity-packed nuptials of an old

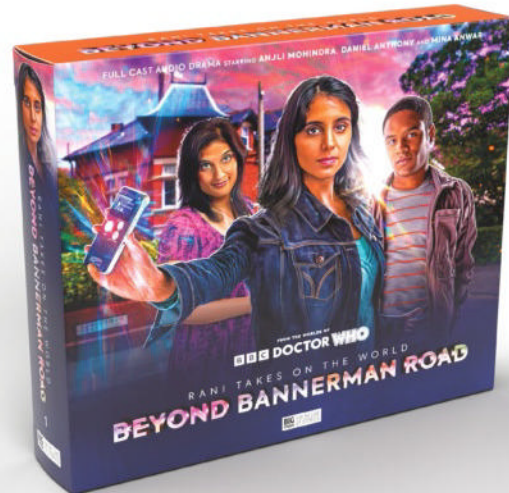
schoolfriend. But Tiff's fairy tale romance seems too good to be true – and she's invited a surprising number of people she bears grudges towards to her special day. There are some poignant moments and musings on life seeming to pass you by, but it's a weaker tale with too neat an ending.

"The Witching Tree" by Lizzie Hopley ups the dread factor as Rani investigates a mysterious tree

growing through a restaurant. There are some genuinely creepy moments, and it's interesting to get a sense of Rani's work, but the ending to one story thread feels almost unreasonably cruel and sours the finale somewhat. An entertaining set that has its flaws.

**Rhian Drinkwater**

**i** A TV show about the life of suffragette Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, written by Anjali Mohindra, is in development.







## FIRE

Fire! It'll cause you to burn. But did it cause you to learn?  
Time to find out, with our latest brain-scorching quiz

Quizmaster Ian Berriman, God of Hellfire

### QUESTION 1

What is the Human Torch's catchphrase?

### QUESTION 2

In which *Doctor Who* story does the Doctor witness the start of the Great Fire of Rome?

### QUESTION 3

And in which *Doctor Who* story is the Doctor present at the start of the Great Fire of London?

### QUESTION 4 Picture Question

Whose house is on fire here, and in what movie?

### QUESTION 5

Which dystopian novel centres on a fireman called Guy Montag?

### QUESTION 6

Complete the title of this song from the musical *Buffy* episode "Once More, With Feeling": "\_\_\_\_ The Fire".

### QUESTION 7

Who was burned to death by an angry mob in a boiler room in Springwood, Ohio?

### QUESTION 8 Picture Question

Name the TV series which featured this character with pyrokinetic powers.

### QUESTION 9

In the *X-Men* comics, by what superhero name is the fire-controlling mutant St John Allerdyce usually known?

### QUESTION 10

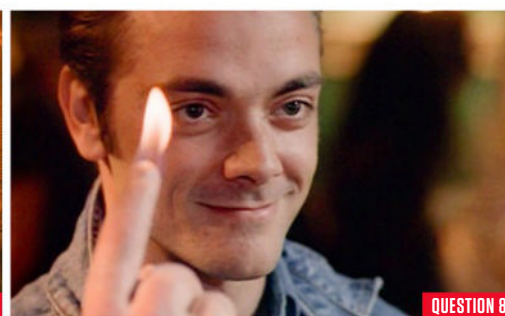
Which space opera show has an episode about an outbreak of fire, titled "Fire In Space"?



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 12



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 16

### QUESTION 11

What song do the people of Summerisle sing at the end of *The Wicker Man*, as their sacrificial offering goes up in flames? (Don't worry about the spelling...)

### QUESTION 12 Picture Question

Name this fiery film.

### QUESTION 13

What's the title of the second book in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* series?

### QUESTION 14

Which relatives of Jean-Luc Picard tragically died in a fire?

### QUESTION 15

Which was the first *Star Wars* film to feature flamethrower-packing Flametroopers?

### QUESTION 16 Picture Question

Name this superhero.

### QUESTION 17

Which 2023 supernatural series begins with a California wildfire?

### QUESTION 18

Which secret organisation features in the classic *Avengers* episode "A Touch Of Brimstone"?

### QUESTION 19

Which 1972 film concerns two children travelling back in time a century to prevent two other children dying in a burning mansion?

### QUESTION 20

In which *Doctor Who* story did the Doctor end up lighting the Olympic Flame?

Answers  
1 "Flame on!" 2 "The Romans"  
3 "The Visitation" 4 Laurie Strode's, Halloween Kills 5 Fahrenheit 451  
6 Walk Through 7 Freddy Krueger  
8 The X-Files 9 Pyro 10 Battlestar Galactica 11 "Summer Is A-Cumen In"  
12 Firestarter 13 Catching Fire  
14 Brother Robert and nephew René  
15 The Force Awakens 16 Firestar  
17 Wolf Pack 18 The Hellfire Club  
19 The Amazing Mr Blunden 20 "Fear Her"

### How did you do?

Is your intellect alight?

0-5

Non-combustible

6-10

Spark

11-15

Smouldering

16-19

Blaze

20

Inferno



# IN THE NEXT ISSUE



## WE BOLDLY GO AGAIN STRANGE NEW WORLDS

The continuing *Star Trek* mission

### THE WALKING DEAD: DEAD CITY

It's raining dead, hallelujah!

### THE FLASH

Batman returns, again

### TRANSFORMERS

The Beasts will Rise!

### THE BOOGEYMAN

He's gonna get you...

### SPIDER-MAN

One more swing around the Multiverse

### PLUS!

Gremlins! Doctor Who! Sea witches!

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All contents are subject to change - we're not the TARDIS, you know.



# Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi and fantasy



## Shrek

**Lauren Milici, Senior Entertainment Writer, GamesRadar**



It's probably a bit embarrassing to identify as an adult fan of *Shrek*, but it entered my brain in 2001 and has simply never left.

In the decades since its release, it's become something of an internet meme and spawned a universe of successful spin-offs – but it will forever be cemented in my heart as the greatest children's movie of all time, one I still watch when I, a 29-year-old who pays taxes, am feeling down.

What makes *Shrek* so great? It's weird. It's a PG movie about an ogre with a Scottish accent who hates everything and everyone (but loves mud, farting, and making candles of his own earwax) who teams up with an annoying

talking donkey to rescue a rough-and-tough princess... who he ends up falling in love with. At seven years old, my brain exploded.

My childhood was steeped in Disney princess lore and *Anastasia* and *Ferngully*; the protagonists were pretty, run-of-the-mill princesses, their friends were animals or creatures that hardly spoke unless it was to move the plot along, and the villains were terrifying. In *Shrek*, the villain is a 4'6 Lord who constantly overcompensates for his height and is determined to have his people believe he's the hero – even though he's anything but.

Instead of getting a beautiful singing montage from Princess Fiona, we watch her harmonise with a bird until her vocal fry makes it blow up... then she cooks its eggs for breakfast. I remember thinking nothing of it

at the time, and nothing of it on my fourth or twentieth watch as a kiddo. It was cool. It was cooler than cool. I wanted to do that with my voice too, and even tried it once or twice.

I don't know much about the directors of *Shrek* (Andrew Adamson and Vicky Anderson), but I do know that they had me out in the wilderness trying to blow up a bird all because I wanted to be like this atypical princess – who was actually an ogre, thanks to a magical spell cast by the witch who locked her up.

It's one of the most bonkers movies ever made, and it made my childhood sunny and fun. Thank goodness for gross ogres – and Eddie Murphy, I guess. ●

*Lauren is currently busy editing the Shrek The Third Wikipedia page.*

### Fact Attack!

→ *Shrek* was based on a 1990 picture book of the same name by former *New Yorker* cartoonist William Steig, written in his eighties.

→ "Shrek" means fear or terror in Yiddish. The word is derived from the similar German word "Schreck" (Max Schreck, anyone?).

→ Chris Farley was initially cast as Shrek, and recorded most of the dialogue before his death by drug overdose in December 1997.

→ UK-born Mike Myers originally used his normal speaking voice, but later decided to redo all his lines with a Scottish accent.

→ *Shrek* won Best Animated Feature at the 74th Academy Awards – the first time that the category had ever been included.

© DREAMWORKS 2001





**OUT  
AUGUST**



**'I'm a Time Lord.** I've been around, you know.  
Two Hearts, respiratory bypass system.  
I haven't lived seven hundred and fifty years  
without learning something...'

**THE DOCTOR**



MARVEL STUDIOS

# BLACK PANTHER

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BY THE  
CHINEKE! ORCHESTRA

SAT  
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2:30PM, 7:30PM

ROYAL ALBERT HALL



"TRANSFORMING A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES INTO SOMETHING SPECIAL."

THE MAIL



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